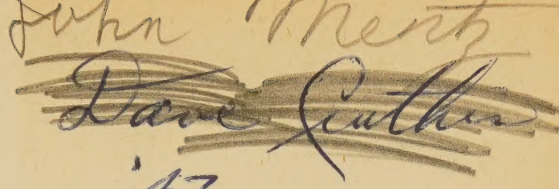
John Merz
Dave Luther
'47

PEARL DIVER

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QUICK AS A FLASH, I WHIRLED ABOUT, GRABBING THE RAZOR-SHARP KNIFE FROM MY BELT AND SLASHED WITH THE FULL SWEEP OF MY ARM IN THE DIRECTION OF THIS TOUCH.

PEARL DIVER

by Victor Berge &
Henry Wysham Lanier

DOUBLEDAY & COMPANY, INC.
Garden City, New York

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THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS
GARDEN CITY, N. Y.
CL

DEDICATED TO

THREE FRIENDS WHO NEVER FAILED

RO

Gentleman of Rapa

MEXICAN JACK

Yaqui-Mexican Sailor

SHANGHAI CHARLIE

Chinese Bank-Clerk Adventurer

CONTENTS

BOOK I

SEEKING: A LIFE TO LIVE

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	I Fall in Love	3
II	A Boy in a Swedish Village	9
III	I Make Acquaintance with Injustice	17
IV	Call of the Sea	33
V	Hell Ships and Runaways	46
VI	From Possums to Pearls	68

BOOK II

FINDING: THE WONDER OF ISLAND LIFE

VII	Waking into a New Life	87
VIII	The Blue Grotto Undersea	96
IX	The Big Pearl	121
X	I Acquire Three Friends and a Lugger	138

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XI	The Terror of the Deep	158
XII	Taking Octopus Alive	180
XIII	On a Certain Unfriendliness in Sharks	188
XIV	Duel Between Shark and Octopus	201
XV	Cannibals on Malaita	206
XVI	Song and Dance	226
XVII	Interlude in the Air	254
XVIII	A Childhood Memory at Need	276
XIX	Technique of a Diver's Work	289
XX	Fishing for Pearl Necklaces	304
XXI	True Pearls, Imitations and "Cultures"	322
XXII	The Secret Beds of Precious Coral	338
	Epilogue: Looking Back and Forward	351

INTRODUCTION

VICTOR BERGE *lived this narrative. I have merely tried to express his experiences and ideas as he would have done himself, had he not been so fortunate as to spend his life in doing things instead of writing about them.*

"Exact truth" has, of course, a large element of relativity, since it must be reported by imperfect human senses; but I can at least say that in this book the single desire of both narrator and recorder has been to present what actually happened.

Those who lament the passing of Romance with the making known of every mysterious region of the earth, except the Antarctic, might consider this Undersea World in which Berge has spent most of his working life. Here is a vast territory, much larger than all the land area of all the globe, with mountains higher than the Himalayas, with precipices, plains, and valleys—and with a swarming life in the shallower parts of which our knowledge is still most limited.

A pearl diver like Victor Berge is an explorer-pioneer, reporting of new country.

H. W. L

A TECHNICAL STATEMENT

SUCH a true narrative as this, in the first person yet produced in collaboration, seems to demand a statement of the method employed.

I talked with Mr. Berge until I knew the real man, knew much of what he had to tell. Then, with a stenographer out of sight behind him, he related his life and adventures—as the events came to his mind, or in response to many questions. For a total of forty hours, over three weeks, he talked, the court reporter took down, I soaked it all in. An exact transcript was made of his words.

During these recitals I sat with cyclopedia at my elbow, consulting the proper maps to cover the locality of which he spoke, from Sweden to the Paumotus; consulting references to be sure I understood every detail. The effort was to live imaginatively beside the narrator through every experience described.

Then I plunged into a number of authoritative works, checked up all sorts of technical matters—in order to certify the backgrounds and minutiæ.

Finally I rewrote the entire story. Probably there are not a dozen complete sentences in the whole tale which are exactly as Mr. Berge spoke them. But all of his expressions are there, his facts, his feelings, his

character as I managed to derive it from long, intimate talks.

In a word, I have attempted to put myself, as a machine for expressing events and ideas in words, inside this other human being.

That is a highly fiduciary relation. The best evidence of single-mindedness in the effort is that Mr. Berge found himself in the finished narrative. For while the least assuming or egotistic of mortals, he has a powerful individuality, and an intense professional absorption in his work—and he is so vitally interested in the thing as it happened that he could not countenance any divergence or intrusion of another personality.

H. W. L.

BOOK I

SEEKING: A LIFE TO LIVE

ON THE SEA FLOOR

CHAPTER I

I FALL IN LOVE

THE first time I ever fell in love it was with a sailboat. Now, thirty years later, I do not even remember her name. But it was clearly a case of love at first sight. That is one of the sharpest recollections of my childhood in Sweden.

It was at Ockelbo, a little village in the pine forests of Gestrikland, and I was about ten years old.

My father's tannery was right at the lake shore, perhaps fifty feet up from the water, with the house and garden beside it, and a duck farm. There was a small dock for the use of the factory.

I had a little flat-bottomed skiff that I paddled about in during the summer, and I was very apt to be in this, or fishing from the dock, or swimming, for I was always at home on or in the water.

One day, as I came down to the shore, I saw a strange boat with a mast, moored to a buoy a little way out from the dock. I had never seen anything like her, for there were no sailboats on the lake, and she came to me as a complete surprise. In fact, I found myself so interested and excited that I had to investigate. So I rowed out in my skiff and looked her over.

She was probably twenty feet long, with nice curving lines, and catboat rigged. I knew it must be her sail that made her go, but I couldn't figure out how, and I kept rowing around her, wondering how it was possible to handle such a craft. I understood a rowboat; and I'd often watched the lumbering crews, working rafts of logs along the lake with ropes and capstan, while one man did nothing but play tunes on the accordion to keep the other men hauling together. These rivermen were my friends and used to tell me stories of their work. But this was something new. Somehow it seemed to concern me vitally, and I knew I had to find out about it.

Consequently I was much excited a few days later when my father announced that the whole family and some friends were going off on a picnic in the new boat to an island a couple of miles down the lake. For the sailboat was apparently not for the tannery's use, but merely for pleasure trips.

I was very keen to see them sail. Now I was to learn all the things which I'd been trying to puzzle out by myself.

But when the great moment arrived, though the sail was already bent on and snugly furled, the men of the party began to row, instead of hoisting it. And we rowed all the way to the island and back! That was the most disappointing picnic I ever took part in. In point of fact, I doubt if my father had ever seen a boat sailing, and nobody in the party had any more idea than he how she should be handled. All I knew at the time was that everything had gone flat.

I couldn't stay away from that mysterious boat which could make the wind drive it along. Each day I would sneak out in my skiff, get aboard, and study out the different ropes. Pretty soon I had the stoppers off and was hoisting the gaff. The sail bellied out and flapped about, but I watched how the breeze took it and started her through the water, till her mooring rope brought her up short. Gradually I got the idea; and before long I could sheet the gaff almost home, so that the sail was stretched to its full length. I knew then I was ready for the real thing.

Picking a time when there was nobody around, I went out to what I already considered *my* boat. Straining and tugging, I managed to hoist the big sail. The wind was nor'west; the canvas filled. With many anxious glances up at the house and tannery I cast off from the buoy.

All of a sudden the boat was alive. The sail bellied gently out. She glided away through the rippling

water, smoothly, evenly, without a sound. I could have yelled with joy at the feeling of power, the sense of adventure which transformed the familiar lake. To be sure, I still had in mind the danger of being hailed and stopped by somebody: I ducked down and hid behind the gunwale as we sped out into the lake, never thinking that that big expanse of moving white sail would catch an eye far sooner than my small figure at the tiller.

We were off, broadside to the wind, and I let her go. There might be a scolding or a beating awaiting me back there, but at least for the time I was sliding farther away from trouble every minute—into something new and altogether fascinating.

Keeping the sail full, I went wherever that course would take me—which happened to be right out across the lake. Soon, however, I saw the log drive ahead; thousands of logs lying in the lake till they could be rafted down the river. Not knowing how to tack, this became more of a problem every moment, as those big timbers came closer and closer; but the wind was moderate: I managed to slant her up alongside of the outer boom logs, and then shoved her about by main strength and started off on the other tack.

For the next hour or so I was anxiously experimenting, noticing what happened when the wind struck the sail at different angles, finding out by trial and error how close I could hold the boat into the wind, hauling the bow around with an oar again and again when I got too muddled up. By this time I was nearing the head of the lake, and the house was almost

out of sight. I realized I must be starting back, so I clumsily worked the bow about and started to run back before the wind.

We were sweeping smoothly along with an ease and swiftness that started all sorts of new ideas in my mind when I saw someone rowing up toward me in a skiff. He started to wave. It was my older brother, evidently sent to bring me in.

Just then came one of the squalls to which these mountain lakes are so subject and which make them really unfit for sailing. Before I knew it the wind was blowing several times as hard as it had been. Even if I'd wanted to, I could probably not have managed to stop and take my brother aboard. But I had no such idea anyhow: being picked up and taken back in charge of someone else didn't appeal to me. I sat back at the tiller, looking alternately at my sail and at the rowboat, headed for home, and dashed past him like a racehorse. I could see him break out laughing at the sight, so I knew I had nothing to fear there later on.

It was blowing hard now; the wind sang through the ropes, the following waves splashed up angrily, and the taut sail jerked like a spirited horse every now and then as we bowled along. I didn't know enough to be afraid. Holding her straight for the dock, I covered the distance in quarter of the time it had taken me to beat up the lake. By the time I neared the dock, the sudden gust had lessened again; I managed with my new skill to come about into the wind, catch the buoy, and make fast.

Straightening up, I looked to shore: the whole crowd from the factory, foreman and all, my father and my sisters, were lined up on the bluff, staring down at me. My heart was going pretty fast, for fear of what was coming to me; but I saw several of the men grinning, so I sculled ashore in my skiff and walked up the hill like a conquering hero.

My father looked at me hard, his face working. Evidently he thought he ought to be severe with me, but knowing nothing of boats himself, he could not help feeling proud of my expedition; so presently he turned away.

I didn't get punished at all. That, I suppose, helped to make this one of the big days in my life. I had found something which seemed to belong peculiarly to me. And while I never dreamed how much my after life was to be influenced by sailing vessels and the sea, I did realize that a new world had opened for me.

And to think that the years could wipe out the name of that first love!

SNAKE SHELL

CLOTHES IN
A MARKET BASKET

CHAPTER II

A BOY IN A SWEDISH VILLAGE

MY FATHER had come to Ockelbo from Bollnäs, fifty miles north in Gefleborg, when my mother died. I was only five then, and I merely remember sitting in the cart as we drove to the funeral and the solemn sound of the church bell tolling.

At Ockelbo I went to the public school, on foot, or on skis when the snow came, and I and my older brother and three sisters were under the charge of a housekeeper who looked after us and the servants. We had a big house and everything comfortable; for my father was a hard worker and a good business

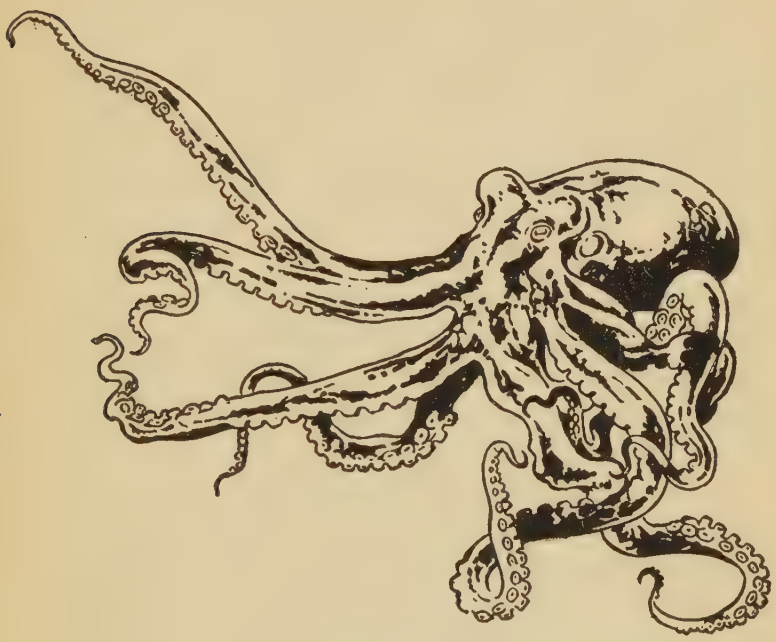
man: his tannery made money, because he saw to everything himself—buying the hides, the tanning, and especially the selling; and he was one of the important men in our community.

It was, of course, an event in the routine, but it really made very little difference in my life when one day my father came back from Stockholm with a new wife, his third. She was kind to us and fitted right in, so that everything went on as before.

I used to sleep at the tanning factory. I didn't like the children's chamber in the big house, so they put a cot in the office, and all summer I would use that. I could even bring my friends there, especially Bror Olsen. He was a butcher's son, about my age, and we used to do all sorts of things together—plenty of devilment, too, for we were active, healthy youngsters, up to every kind of sport or mischief. We had this place all to ourselves, and there was many a night expedition we made, and many a trick we played on people in the village, that no one else ever knew about.

The labourers in the tannery used to travel from one place to another in those days. Some of them had been all over Sweden, and they would often tell me stories of other places, but none of these tales made much impression on my mind. Even the yarns from the deep woods and along the rivers which the logging crews liked to tell went in one ear and out the other. But one day one of the factory men declared he had seen a strange creature in the water; and when I asked my father about it he finally related

how different people had seen some sort of monster in a big lake near his former factory. The accounts differed, but it was generally supposed to be a *Kraken,*



OCTOPUS

a sort of water dragon. I used to try to imagine what sort of a beast this could be, and I finally got a picture of a thing like a sea serpent, but not very long, with a big head.

The mysterious air everybody put on when telling these tales, especially the story of the man who claimed he had actually seen the monster—that got my goat. It made my swimming and fishing, and, later, my sailing, much more exciting; for I always

had in the back of my mind a notion that at any time this queer beast might show itself. The idea made me curious but not afraid. Somehow I never feared anything about the water. Indeed, even on land I can't remember being nervous about the dark, though in that part of the world even grown people used to whisper about spooks and elves and all kinds of superstitions, and it was not uncommon for children to be terrified by the forests or the blackness of the winter night.

While I was not interested in all the processes of turning green hides into leather, and never found my fun in helping, my father believed, as everyone in Sweden used to believe, that a boy must have some responsibilities, some real useful work. So I had my jobs—and they had to be done.

I was responsible for keeping the house wood-box full. There was some fun about using an ax, but the sawing—that was another story. I suppose if one wants to get firmly fixed in a boy's mind the idea that you can't get something for nothing there isn't any tool in the world that will do the job better than an old-fashioned bucksaw. I didn't like it. But while my father was a kindly man and fond of us, he was as firm as a rock about anything like that. There wasn't any question about it: it just had to be done.

Then he gave me a chance to earn some pocket money by preparing the hemlock bark for the leaching pit. The sheets of bark were carried down by the lake to dry in the sun; when it was dried the surface had to be scored and broken up with a hand scraper;

then it was cut into handy pieces and stowed away in barrels. I would chalk up a tally of the barrels in the shed by that oldest method of fives, four straight strokes and then a slanting one— 𝍸 ; and I got one penny for each barrel. That was my earning capacity. And mighty glad I was to have those pennies, for, while the village store at Ockelbo was small, there were sweets there, and, above all, hooks and floats and sinkers for fishing. And fishing was something at which I could spend hours and hours without getting tired of it.

Fortunately, one of my responsibilities, oddly enough, involved this favourite sport. The tannery was infested with rats, great big rascals who were drawn there by the raw hides the farmers were continually bringing in. They did so much damage that we had an army of cats there to keep them down. There were a lot of them, and by spring they used to get mighty tired of raw meat and the rats they caught; so one of my regular jobs after the ice went out was to catch fresh fish for the cats. That suited me. It suited the cats too. They soon got to know that I meant the kind of dinner they liked. Naturally, they were all over the place; so when they'd see me go and get my fishing pole their eyes would all begin to watch me. When I would start for the lake the whole pack, a dozen at a time, would follow solemnly after me and settle down in a half circle behind me, while I sat down and began to fish for the little perch which were plentiful near shore. At first I'd take a fish off and throw it back to one after the other: but

I got to experimenting, and those cats were so clever that after a while, when I had a good bite, I would jerk up so hard that I'd throw the fish right over my head back to them. Generally the fish would break off the hook before it reached them, but if it didn't they'd grab it and pull it off. Anyhow, though I used to spend whole summer days swimming and pulling up fish for them in that way, I never caught a cat on the hook.

Even when winter came I managed to go on fishing, for we would cut holes through the ice and catch bigger fish than when the water was open. Besides that, when the first ice came there was a more exciting way of catching pickerel: I would ski over the thin ice, swaying, bending and cracking under my weight, and every now and then I would see one of these long, slim pickerel lying motionless just under the frozen surface; a sharp rap on the ice just above the fish would stun it, and I would chop a hole quickly and grab it out of the water.

In that part of Sweden, 61 degrees North, snow would come by October, and we would be pretty well snowed in from then till March. With several feet of snow on the level we had to use skis as soon as we got off the broken-out road. I would cover four or five miles to school and back each day, so, small as I was, skiing came to be as natural as walking. We had ski-running contests, generally on the level surface of the lake, and I remember well how proud I was when I entered one of these races with much bigger boys and came in second. I almost collapsed

at the finish, but my father had encouraged me to try, saying, "Go ahead and do your best," and I saw he was pleased.

How wild the country was right around our village is clear from the fact that as I got older I used to go out on skis with a trapper who tended his line of traps from home. We would start from our house cross-country, through the woods, and look over his sets for fox and mink. There was no big game, but this man would have quite a bundle of furs by the end of the season.

It was, of course, a narrow life, shut off from the rest of the world. My father would go on business to Gefle, or even to Stockholm; but he never talked to me about the cities or places outside, and I had not the vaguest idea what they were like. One of the few things which roused my curiosity as to what might lie beyond our village and lake and woods was the coming of a Negro, who was a travelling salesman. I never knew what he sold, but his black face and his features struck me as very funny. They said he came from America, and at times I'd wonder what kind of country that could be where the people looked like that.

This Negro used to carry a guitar with him, and he would sit down and begin to pick it and sing what must have been Southern darky songs, his eyes rolling and his black face shining. He had learned a little Swedish, and he would tell comical stories with an accent and with strange words mixed in which made me burst with laughing, and caused me to think more

than ever about this queer America place from which he came. That I would ever see it myself didn't occur to me at all.

Indeed, my imagination did not get much beyond our lake, and the river which flowed in and out of it, and the big woods that stretched away over the hills—except from one impulse. I must have read in school about the old Vikings, and there were times when the sagas of those bold sea-rovers stirred something inside of me. But while I was so full of natural health and strength that I was rather more adventurous than the other boys in the outdoor matters of our small world, I can recall no evidence that I would have been driven to roam over tens of thousands of square miles of the uncivilized portion of the globe had my life gone on in this normal little round.

But a real tragedy was waiting just around the corner. And it was to alter everything for me so completely that the greater part of my life was to have no relation to these childish years in the quiet Swedish village.

CONCH SHELL

CHAPTER III

I MAKE ACQUAINTANCE WITH INJUSTICE

IT MUST have been in 1902, when I was eleven, that I came home from school one afternoon and was told there was something the matter with my father. He had been on a trip to the south, to some leather fair, and had had a stroke in the train. They had brought him home, but one side was almost completely paralyzed; he had to be carried in and put in bed.

I hardly understood what had happened, but of course I knew it was a misfortune, and I was awed. However he had all of us children come into his room

and kissed us and tried to explain. Finally he said to me:

"Pinch my arm."

So I pinched it.

"Harder," he said.

I looked at his eyes and saw he meant it, so I pinched as hard as I could.

"You see," said he, trying to smile, "I feel nothing any more."

I was sorry, because I could feel he was sad in spite of his calmness and his smile. But everything seemed to be going on much as before, except that my older brother had to take my father's place in the tannery, and Father would lie still on the bed instead of being around everywhere taking charge of everything. Presently, when he was a little better, he would have long talks with Robert about details of the business.

Naturally, I wanted to help too, so when school was over I got a job in a little grocery store which had been opened not far from our house, and I took great pride in sweeping it out, and carrying in boxes, and even waiting on customers.

It wasn't long, though, before a weight of anxiety seemed to settle down on the whole household. More than once I overheard my father declaring that things were going all wrong with the business; then my brother would try to cheer him up; but he was only sixteen, and it was clear my father knew too much about it all not to see that there were many places where his management was urgently needed to keep

matters running properly. He had always done the selling himself, going to the fairs and the big dealers, and now there was nobody who knew anything about this most important side of the work.

As the months went on his helplessness became harder and harder for him. His mind was just as full of fight as ever; he had a masseur come regularly, and would painfully go through all sorts of exercises, always trying to get back the use of his right leg and arm. But the list of workmen in the factory grew smaller and smaller; there was a heavy frown on his forehead when he thought nobody was looking at him; and often he would get excited in talking to my brother and declare the whole business was going to pieces. By the time he could slowly limp across to the tannery, just a hundred feet from the house, there was nobody working there except the foreman and a handful of men.

That almost deserted place, which had been so full of activities controlled by him, was a bitter sight for him. He began to discuss selling the tannery, as the best chance to save a part of what he had built up.

On top of everything else my stepmother fell ill. One day she called me in to her bedside and told me she was going to leave us. In the next room my father was lying, barely able to move.

She died. We buried her in the little churchyard, and again the mournful bell tolled, as it had for my own mother years before.

That seemed to finish my father. He began to brood more than ever. He was afraid that if something

definite wasn't done soon about the factory there would be no money left for us; and yet he was unable to do it.

A day came when I reached the house to learn that he had killed himself. Somehow he had managed to fasten a cord around the handle of the door, with a noose about his neck, and had simply fallen over sideways.

So there was another funeral from our home. And something happened which I could never really understand: the bell did not ring for my father.

That silence impressed me as wrong, as a slight to him. Finally I asked someone: "Why don't they ring the bell?"

And a whispered explanation came: "When a man takes his own life the Church will not give him the usual service."

I knew my father's situation and just how he had felt. I had listened to long discussions, had actually heard him declare that if he were going to be always a helpless cripple, we'd be better off without him. This tannery and the home were all he had; turned into money soon, there'd be enough to educate us children and give us a start; but if things just dragged along, with all these extra expenses, everything would go to the dogs.

Right or wrong, he had sacrificed his life for us. And the Church publicly declared him an outcast! Even to-day I can't understand that church rule; and many times in later years when I met missionaries

in the South Seas—fine men, many of them—and discussed religion with them, that particular scene would flash into my mind, that strange idea.

That was the first time I came on injustice. It does something to a boy when he first faces what seems to be deep unfairness from people whom he's been brought up to respect and even revere.

I puzzled over this a lot, and felt very bitter toward those people; but I had no realization of the fact that my father's death marked the end of my normal home existence, that it was the beginning of something which was to make a completely different life for me, having no more relation to those childhood years than if they belonged to another person.

The relatives flocked in from different sections and held a family council to decide what was to be done. They finally made my half sister's husband guardian over us: he was to take entire charge and sell the tannery, and we children were to be divided up among our many relations at Bollnäs.

All but myself. I was to go to live with a butcher in Ockelbo who had supplied us with meat. I found it hard to understand that. At least, though, I began to see that things were going to be different indeed for me. I had nothing against this new guardian, my half-sister's husband, but he was a stranger to me, and he was not specially interested in me. No doubt the whole business was a nuisance to him: he was a business man, working hard to get ahead himself.

The morning came when they were to leave for Bollnäs. Here was this gloomy home, abandoned, and I was walking back and forth in the rooms like a stray dog. I didn't say anything; I was never a great hand at talking when I felt things deeply, but I noticed that my sisters and brother felt badly when the time came to leave me. They explained that my guardian had tried to place me elsewhere, but there were some reasons that made it impossible; they tried to cheer me up with the promise that I needn't stay long with the butcher; they attempted to work on my boy's pride by entrusting all the keys of the house and factory to me: if any purchaser wanted to look over the property I was to show it all.

All that made no impression on me. My box of belongings had already been carried over to the butcher's. Their things were in the wagon ready to go to the railroad station. When we finally were all in the big children's room, which had been ours for seven years, and were kissing each other good-bye, it seemed the hardest experience my life had brought me up till then. The time was up. They had to leave. I went to the station with them and saw them get aboard in charge of my half-sister and our guardian. There was no place in the party for me. I didn't get into the railway carriage, but kept off to one side and waved good-bye to them. Then, just before the train left, I dodged behind a truck so they shouldn't see me breaking down.

The bell rang, the engine puffed noisily, the train rolled clanking away. I was alone.

I caught on behind a wagon returning to the village, and we soon rattled over the mile of road. I went back to our house first.

It seemed mighty empty, and it was dark inside with the blinds closed. I tried to play around, but the only companions were the cats, and I didn't feel like catching fish for them, as they evidently wished. The afternoon dragged away; it began to get dark. At last anything began to seem more cheerful than being alone in that deserted shell of a place. So with heavy steps I started for my new home.

This butcher was a rough, ignorant fellow, with a dirty, unattractive shop and some rooms opening off from it where he and his wife lived. As I looked at the miserable place and got a whiff of the smell that always seemed to hang about it, I couldn't help comparing it with our own big, pleasant home on the lake shore, where I had belonged. I knew vaguely then how happy I'd been during those years. It's odd how often in life a man has to look back from something disagreeable in order to find out he had been happy at some former time.

I was late for supper, but I didn't feel like eating, anyhow. My chief concern was not to show how much I felt it all. The hardest part was that I seemed a complete outsider in this mean place, yet there was no other spot where I could even imagine myself as being at home. There was only one bedroom in the house, and I was glad to go to my shakedown on the sofa in the dining room and be by myself. That was a miserable evening.

My guardian had arranged to pay this man for my board, enough to more than cover my food and lodging, and it was the idea that I should go on with my school work. But after a few days I was told that I must help with the work.

There was a lean-to shed at one side of the building where they used to slaughter the animals, hogs and sheep and calves and cows. The meats were kept in a sort of cellar underneath, where there was a block made from a section of a tree trunk, and saws and cleavers and knives. They made sausages down here too. They had no ice box or cold storage, so the meats couldn't be kept long; they had to be sold and delivered.

At first my job was to deliver sausages and cuts of meat to the various houses after I came back from school. I didn't like it, and I didn't get along very well with the butcher, either. He was as dirty as his whole place, and no doubt he resented what I was feeling, though I never spoke to him about it.

Every now and then somebody would come along who was interested in the tannery property, and I would have to stop whatever I was doing, get the big bunch of keys, and show these possible buyers over the house and factory and everything else. It was forlorn enough going around with strangers through those rooms I knew so well. I soon faced the idea that somebody else was going to buy it, and no longer thought of the place as my own. But the sailboat,—that was another matter entirely.

She was still down there in the water, just as beau-

tiful as ever, though nobody had ever used her since my father's death; the mere sight of her made my heart beat as I remembered the excitement of learning to handle her and the sense of power as we glided along with a fair wind. I suppose she would be sold too, and I spent many an hour trying to think of some way by which I could possibly keep that boat. I hadn't the slightest notion what it was worth and didn't like to ask anybody. In fact, I couldn't ask, for the only chance I could work out in my mind was that they might all forget about her! That seemed possible enough, the more I studied over it, since nobody had ever shown much interest in her except myself. That was the hope: she'd be forgotten, and I would simply go aboard and take possession of my own.

No purchaser for the property came forward, so after a while auction bills appeared on the trees and fence. The whole business, in several parcels, would be sold at auction on a given day. I thought harder than ever; but still the only idea I could work out was that by good luck my boat would be overlooked.

The day came, a bright, beautiful day in summer. People began to arrive early, driving and walking, hundreds of them, it seemed to me, many familiar faces, many more perfect strangers, for it was a big sale for that region, and they had come from miles around. The whole place was jammed with teams and people.

I slunk around among the crowds, feeling ragged and conspicuous. But nobody paid the least attention

to me: they were all excited about the sale, examining everything, wondering what prices the property and stuff would bring.

The auctioneer got on a chair and began to work up the crowd. I watched him and heard the bids for the tannery, the house, the furniture. I seem to recall that they brought 18,000 crowns.

But none of that really concerned me. What I was waiting for, in a fever, first hoping, then dreading, was to find out if they had thought about the boat. I could look off from the bluff where we were and see her lying there; it didn't seem possible they could forget her. Yet I had a desperate feeling that there was no other chance and that it must happen that way.

Then the auctioneer sold her. She was knocked down to some farmer who had a place farther along on the lake. I didn't pay any attention to the price. It was all over for me from the moment that man asked for bids.

I sidled away from the crowd of laughing, jostling people. Once more I had a bitter sense of injustice. Probably there was some formless notion in my mind that at least that much of my father's property ought to have come to me. Much more it was that she was my boat. Mine because I'd mastered her; mine because I cared more for her than anybody else did. I was learning that that doesn't give valid title in a civilized society. Just the same, I couldn't accept it. It was unfair.

My chum, Bror Olsen, saw how it was with me. He followed me and took me to his house and tried

to get me interested in some of the things we were always doing together. But my heart wasn't in it. I couldn't forget that boat. And I couldn't feel right with a world where that thing could happen and nobody else cared. There wasn't a soul I could talk to about it, so I had to chew on it in secret by myself. And the taste was poisonous to everything.

That state of mind did not help to reconcile me to my life with the butcher. I didn't like anything about him, and, as is usually the case, his natural roughness and meanness were increased by his sense of this. I fancy he got a certain kind of pleasure from taking me down a peg by sending me with deliveries to people with whom my family had been on equal terms.

A couple of months after the auction he called me one day:

"I want you to carry this meat and those sausages to Mrs. So-and-so."

I didn't say a word, but that basket felt as if it weighed a ton when I picked it up and started out. For Mrs. So-and-so was the wife of the man who had bought our property.

It took me a long time to cover that familiar route, though the day was cold. As I neared the front gate I looked down at myself, and was so ashamed of my clothes that I could hardly force myself to go in. The butcher's wife was supposed to keep my things in order; but she did not even mend the tears, and I looked like a real ragamuffin. I had heard too that these people were very rich and had put in all sorts

of new furnishings. I wanted to turn and run away.

The job had to be done, however, so I forced myself along the path to the kitchen door and knocked.

"Come in," cried a servant's voice, roughly.

I stepped inside and began to take out my bundles, glancing around at the kitchen I knew so well. Just then the lady herself came through the door. She threw up her hands in surprise when she saw me.

"Why, it's Victor!" she exclaimed. "What does this mean?"

I was too upset to answer a word. But she was a kindly soul and at once tried to welcome me. "You must come and look over your old home," said she.

So I followed her into the bedrooms. When I saw those I began to break down. It looked quite strange. They had changed all the furniture. The little sofa where I had slept beside my father, after an illness, was gone. And my own special tub. And the old-fashioned Swedish bedstead with the high carved headboard—all were gone, and modern furniture was in their places. Then I missed the tall chest where linen and clothes had been stored.

She took me through the dining room and drawing room, and at last to the big children's room. By this time I was in such a state I couldn't see anything. I knew in a minute I'd begin to bawl, and I wanted to get away quick.

So, like a boy, I began to run back through the rooms. She'd meant to be kind, but it wasn't the way to be kind to me. She was concerned and called out; then she ran after me, and caught up, and took me

in her arms, and tried to sympathize and cheer me. However, I couldn't stand any more. I tore out of the house, forgetting my basket, and the servant had to rush out with it and shout after me. I wanted never to see that house again. And I laid it up against the butcher that I should have been sent there. I had to control myself before I reached the shop for fear he'd have the satisfaction of seeing how much it had hurt.

After that I was more cautious than ever about passing any of our former rich neighbours: I'd walk hundreds of yards out of my way to avoid meeting one of them.

To add to the bad feeling between me and my boss, I took his bicycle for a ride one day without asking him; and, coasting down a steep hill, I suddenly found the brake wouldn't work. The machine got completely out of control, and we plunged down the hill and tumbled fifteen feet down a steep gully, where I landed in a bed of nettles. I was scratched and bruised and shaken up, and the bicycle was badly smashed. The butcher was in a terrible rage about it when I rolled the wheel back, and I never heard the end of that broken bicycle.

Though Ockelbo was my home town, I no longer felt at ease among the people there. I was sensitive about going with the boys of my own class, except Bror Olsen, and I got to making friends among the sawmill labourers. They taught me to smoke and to enjoy Swedish punch when we had any money to buy it. Once in a while I'd go to Sunday school, but

my miserable clothes made me self-conscious, and I didn't enjoy it. I did play football, and, as before, I was always ready for anything on the water or for ski sports.

One of the bright spots in this trying six months or so came before the lake froze over that year. One of the sons of the farmer who'd bought the boat came up to me and asked if I would teach him how to sail her. I almost jumped out of my skin. Nothing in the world could have pleased me more. It didn't take me long to consent.

When I strolled up to this man's place I felt myself somebody of importance, for a whole crowd of his neighbours had come there to see me handle the craft. Besides, I'd been just longing to feel my hand on that tiller again.

We were only three or four miles from my old home when they carried the sails and gear down to the lake. I showed them how to bend on the sail and got everything shipshape. Then, wanting to make a showing, I invited everybody present to come along. Most of them accepted, men, women, and children, so the boat was pretty well filled when we pushed off.

There was quite a fresh breeze blowing, but we didn't get the force of it in the lee of the bank. As soon as we eased out into the open, however, she began to feel it. My passengers soon became nervous. I had handled that boat in much heavier blows, and I knew she was all right, but it was lively work with me climbing over them to get forward and yelling at them to keep still.

Presently the full force of the wind caught the sail. She heeled over till her lee rail took in water. They screamed in earnest at that, so I brought her up into the breeze and began to laugh at them. Very proud of myself, I was.

"Now turn around and get back near shore," they kept saying.

"Nonsense," I declared. "You'll never learn to sail that way."

The parents wouldn't let their sons touch the tiller or the sheet. At last I had to stand in again and put most of the crowd ashore. Then I invited several of the men to come out for a lesson. Not one cared for it, but the rest laughed at them, so they began to feel ashamed. Two or three stepped in; we started off again; and I soon showed them the trick of steering and managing the sail.

Of course, it was in my mind all the time that they would invite me there again to give them further instruction; so I only gave them the first steps. And when I went off, still very proud, I wondered how long it would be before I was back at that tiller again.

However, whether they were afraid of the thing, or whatever it was, I never heard from them again. So that was my last sail in that first of many sailboats.

More than once during this period I had begged my people to take me away from the butcher's house and let me live with some of my own family at Bollnäs. At last I got the welcome news that this was to happen. I began to hope for better times again. But my butcher gave a very poor account of me to

my guardian; in fact, whatever my faults may have been, he greatly exaggerated them and misstated matters. So when I reached Bollnäs, happy and excited over the prospect, I found my guardian very severe and cold.

I resented this, and in my mind I added it on to the other unfairnesses. It was a poor start on a new life.

FIRST SAILBOAT

CHAPTER IV

CALL OF THE SEA

I WAS placed with my grandfather, an old man of nearly ninety, who lived just outside the village of Bollnäs. I went to the high school now, and being thrown on my own resources in that way had developed me: I wanted to go out more, to look for experiences and meet new kinds of people, for I felt older than the boys of my age; also, I was active and full of energy, and there was some deep dissatisfaction growing inside of me. So I got to know a lot of young fellows of all kinds.

There was a dance I went to one night. They had

built a plank platform right out in the woods, with a place in the middle for the musicians, a fiddler and an accordion player. I was beginning to notice the girls, so I went and danced around, watching one girl who I thought was pretty.

In the midst of the fun a friend of mine came up and whispered:

"Have you met the runaway sailors?"

"No; what do you mean?"

"They're deserters from the navy. They don't dare to come out here on the platform for fear of being grabbed. Come on and I'll tell them you're all right. They're full of yarns."

We went out to the edge of the trees, and I met these two, just boys they were. They'd been in the junior class, apprentices, and had run off because they couldn't stand it. One had deserted three times before, and each time had been caught and taken back and flogged.

I saw quite a lot of them after that, and one was the first person who ever put a tattoo mark on me. Though they had never been on any long cruises, just training around, they were never tired of telling stories of what a terrible life it was. There was not much inducement to my imagination in their tales to go to sea—quite the opposite. Yet I found my thoughts turning more and more in that direction, for the water to me meant my boat at Ockelbo, and the idea of her brought back the most exciting pleasure I'd ever known.

While I didn't get into any particular scrapes, I

was running at large with these new acquaintances, and I suppose my guardian must have decided it was time to clamp down on me. Anyhow, I was informed I was to go and work with a local butcher. Why they were determined to make a butcher out of me I can't imagine. I never had any taste for that sort of thing, and this man was a total stranger to me. I knew something about the messy business by this time, could kill a calf and skin it, so I was fairly useful; and at least this man had a cart and a driver to deliver his orders, so I didn't have to lug sausages to people's houses. Before long I was transferred again, this time to another grandfather. He lived near my guardian, who was a partner in some sawmills ten miles from the village.

Matters were worse than ever between him and me. I expect the reports of me he received seemed bad to him. It's queer, but I am not certain if it was this second butcher or somebody else who figured in an incident at this time which had a deep effect on me. The situation and the result on my mind will stay with me as long as I live.

There had been trouble, quite a row, about something I had done. The thing didn't seem serious to me, even if it had been true. But what I never got over was the remembrance of us three sitting there, my guardian and this man and I. And this fellow made some charge against me, a thing I had never heard of.

I stared at him in astonishment. Then I saw he was lying, and knew it, and was trusting to his being older

and responsible to face me down. So I stared at my guardian, my half-sister's husband, the only person to whom I had any right to look. And I saw in his stern face that he believed this lie, that it would be useless to declare I was innocent.

That did something to me. There was no getting away from the fact that I couldn't belong among these people. First the Church at my father's funeral; then all my relatives dropping me among strangers; next my boat sold; my guardian always severe and thinking the worst of me; and finally this responsible man facing me with a lie. Those were all in authority here. How could I ever expect to adjust myself to a world controlled by them?

There were two fellows there who were my special friends. One was a leather maker's son, and the other the son of a lumberman. We used to do everything together, and, of course, during the winter we were on skis most of the time.

We talked things over a lot. I had my mind firmly fixed on cutting loose from all this and going to sea. I had never so much as seen the sea, but that was the only escape I saw and the only thing that appealed to my imagination. I guess it was in my blood. The same thing that drove those old Vikings of Sweden and Norway all over the known world of their time. I was willing to work, but I wanted a different kind of work from a butcher's job. None of the humdrum monotonous work I saw men spending their lives at appealed to me. I wasn't afraid of anything that might happen; it seemed to me there must be something,

somewhere, that would be worth putting all my energies into. So I was bound to get away and look for it. My older brother, of whom I was very fond, had grown tired of tanning and of lumbering, and he

DIVER AND HAMMER-HEAD SHARK

had gone off to America to seek his fortune: that broke the strongest personal link I had there. I'd become separated from my other relations through no act of mine: nothing to stop me there. There was a girl in the school I was pretty fond of, and the fellows used to joke me about her; but even at fourteen I knew that wasn't enough to hold me in the long run. My life was not for any girls.

The other two did not have the reasons for dissatisfaction that I had, but they were excited by my ideas and dreams of a future somewhere else. We decided it was the sea for us.

The trouble was that we had to have a release signed by parents or guardian in order to ship on a vessel at any Swedish port. So many youngsters ran away to sea that the government had passed this regulation and enforced it very strictly. Any captain who signed on a boy under age would get into serious trouble. So we couldn't just get down to the coast, fifty miles to the east, and find a ship at some port there. And I knew my guardian would never give me the permit to leave. That way was blocked.

We'd been reading in school about Gustavus Vasa, the great national hero of Sweden, and how, hundreds of years ago, after his father and all the nobles were treacherously assassinated by the King of Denmark, he fled on skis up country, through the wild hills of Dalecarlia and over into Norway—to come back in triumph and become king of a free land. That saga had fired my fancy. Suddenly the inspiration came: why not do like Gustavus—strike through the forests into Norway, where these troublesome regulations about shipping didn't exist?

The other two thought this a wonderful idea. We didn't even know the name of any port on the Norway coast, but if we kept on west over the mountains we'd be bound to strike the sea sooner or later, and then something would surely turn up. That it was a matter of three hundred miles in a straight line, mostly

through a wilderness of forest, mountains, lakes, and rivers did not trouble us at all: for we didn't know it. We began to work out our definite plan.

For a long time I had been getting ready for confirmation. That is a big event in a Swedish boy's life; you are trained by the pastor for two or three months, learning the catechism by heart. I rather wanted to finish the job after all that; and, besides, there would be a better opportunity to get away unobserved on the evening of that day. So we fixed on that. We began to save up all the money we could get, and each of us gradually put together a parcel of belongings which we might either use or sell. My grandfather contributed some pipes and tobacco without knowing of it.

By the morning of the confirmation day I had my things all packed, tied up in a shawl, and hidden outside, with a sled, where I could get them without being seen. The others were to hide out in an old barn outside the village.

I had the usual new clothes for the ceremony, a sort of smoking jacket and long trousers; so when my half-sister and her husband came to take me to the church, I was all rigged up. I'm afraid I didn't think much about the confirmation service: I was wondering if my chums would succeed in getting away and just how we should manage that night. But I was confirmed and received the communion, and then all the older members shook hands.

As soon as it was over, I got back to the house, changed my clothes, and dodged out to where I had

left my bundle. It was getting dusk, so I had no trouble in sneaking off. Before long I had joined my two friends at this out-of-the-way barn, and we burrowed down in the hay for the night. Very early next morning we started off westward through the woods, on skis, dragging our stuff behind us on the sled.

It was gay at first. I felt free for the first time since I'd sat at the tiller of my boat on the Ockelbo lake; the country was wild, and there was nobody we had to watch out for except woodchoppers, whom we could hear far off, and an occasional charcoal burner. They still made charcoal there by the old method: sticks of birch or some other hardwood piled up in a heap, this covered with turf, and the whole thing fired to smoulder and char for a long time. The charcoal burners were solitary folk, anyhow, and nobody bothered us. We put a long distance between us and the village, then struck into a road going westward, and by night we felt we were safe from any pursuit.

It must have been two or three weeks that we travelled, always working to westward. We had no map, but we knew the general direction. We'd avoid the few villages, except when one of us would go in to sell something and buy food. At night we'd generally manage to find a barn, bury ourselves deep in the hay, leaving just a tiny hole for air, and pull all our wrappings over us. It was terribly cold, but we kept each other warm.

We were nearly halfway to the Norway border when I realized that my friends were losing courage. One was always thinking about his mother, the other about his father. I had neither mother nor father, and I was convinced there was something ahead of me, so naturally I wanted to keep on and get to it. But, feeling the way they did, the hardships of this way of travelling and our slow progress affected them more and more.

I had started the thing, and they looked to me to get them out of it somehow. So I saw it was no use; and not wishing to separate from them, I suggested that we make for the railroad, take a train back to the coast beyond our home, and trust to luck to smuggle ourselves on board of something. Any change from this lonely trip into the unknown mountains suited them. Presently we found ourselves in a cheap fishermen's boarding house in Söderhamn, where the Dal River empties into the Gulf of Bothnia.

Hardly had we arrived and begun to scout around for a vessel when the police picked us up. My guardian had sent out a general alarm, and the whole police force had been on the lookout for us. A month after we had set out, we landed back in Bollnäs in disgrace, sorry-looking objects, with packs on our backs containing all sorts of miscellaneous plunder —including one bottle of vile barley brandy ("aquavit") in mine.

We were taken before some official who threat-

ened us with such severe penalties that my chums began to cry. As for myself, when I was turned over to my stern legal guardian I was indignant and disappointed. Why wouldn't he let me go? It was more my business than anyone else's, and that was what I wanted. I could see him eyeing me and making up his mind I'd probably run off again if I got the chance; so he set out with me for my grandfather's house.

I thought I'd better get rid of that brandy—it was terrible stuff, anyhow—so I fell behind, slipped the bottle out of the pack, and flung it into the ditch. He heard it fall, though, came back and picked it up, put it into the pack, and watched me closely the rest of the way. I was feeling very bitter by the time we reached my grandfather's.

The old man took the whole business as a joke: it seemed quite a story to him, and nothing to worry about. But my guardian was angry through and through. He began to scold me, and when he saw it was having no effect, he started threats, finally shouting that he would send me to a reform school.

That was too much, on top of having all my plans wrecked. For the first time, I defied him right there —the first time in my life I had ever done such a thing.

"If you put me in that place," I said, "or if you even try to, God help you when I come out."

At that he came at me in a perfect rage, intending to give me a beating. Either I was too big and husky, or he didn't like to do it before the old gentleman;

he changed his mind and went off, telling my grandfather he was to keep me locked up.

So there I was, virtually a prisoner, no school to occupy my thoughts, unable to get to my friends, just eating my heart out. When I quieted down my common sense got to work. I was just as determined as ever to get off on some vessel; but it was only too clear this man had legal power over me: my real problem was to convince him that he had better give his permission. I began to work along this line at every chance. I would talk to my sisters till I was in a fever, explaining that there was no use of restraining me, for I was bound to go sooner or later; that I didn't want to be a butcher and I did intend to go to sea.

I couldn't see that I was making any headway; at last, however, my half-sister came over to my side. She started arguing with her husband at night; and at last she persuaded him to give her the formal permit allowing me to sail.

When she handed me that letter I was happy. Now nothing should stop me.

My two friends still protested they wanted to go along; how that could be managed I didn't know. I had very little money, too. None of that really worried me, however. That unknown something was still ahead waiting for me; and at last the road was opening.

I went down to the coast again. The news was bad: there was no telling when I could get either passage or a job on any vessel from there. My money was too low to wait long, so when the station master at the

railroad asked me if I wanted to work I accepted in a hurry.

"I'll make you a porter," said he.

"All right," I said. He put a cap on me, and I started right in.

I didn't care much for that work. Everybody was shouting at me, and it meant nothing. That wasn't what I was looking for. It was just marking time.

I got my two friends down and soon saw they were uncertain again.

"You have permission," they said, "but we haven't."

"Never mind," I declared, "I'll manage all that." Still, I had no notion how.

All three of us went to Gefle. No chance there. One of my chums became worried about his mother and went home. We two tried Söderhamn once more.

There, at last, I heard of a vessel. At the Seamen's Institute they told me there was a lumber schooner, lying some miles down the coast, whose captain wanted a green hand.

I hadn't any idea of actually signing on until I worked out a plan for getting my chum aboard also. Before I knew it, though, they had bluffed me with a threat of take it or lose it. I signed. I realized then I was going off alone and leaving the only friends I had in the world. That made me feel desperate, but there was nothing to be done. I had to report on board or have the police after me again.

Hard as this was, I was excited at the prospect. Going to sea at last! I little fancied that my

seagoing for the next twenty years was to cover a distance of many times around the globe, and was to bring adventures which would have seemed fantastic even to the expectant imagination of that fourteen-year-old country boy.

CHAPTER V

HELL SHIPS AND RUNAWAYS

I DOUBT if any one of the millions of boys who have boarded a strange vessel to begin their sea life ever looked more comical than I did when I climbed aboard this lumber schooner. I was a country boy, inland bred and dressed that way; everything was strange to me; then I had heard and read such tales about sailors, and had seen them in so many drunken rows ashore, that each man on deck looked like a cut-throat to my staring eyes. To crown all, I was carrying my few belongings in a market basket.

The first man who set eyes on me broke into a roar

of laughter. Others came up and joined in; men's heads popped out of the fo'c'sle: my seagoing basket certainly made a hit with that crew.

I didn't say much, I was upset by this reception; but I put my basket down in the fo'c'sle as I was told. When someone went through it he found a revolver I had stowed away—which indicates the way I felt about what I was going to. The skipper promptly confiscated that.

"You can't have any gun aboard this ship," said he.

What was worrying me most was the realization that I could see no way to arrange for my chum, and the longer I thought about going off without him the more impossible that appeared. I was in a nice jam, for the schooner was to sail for England next day.

At last I plucked up courage, went to the skipper, and told him I wanted to go ashore to tell some friends good-bye. He gave me permission so I rowed in and looked up my chum. After a great conference, we decided the only way out was for me to desert: that meant we'd have to sneak my basket off the ship.

We were a frightened pair when we got into a skiff at the wharf that dark night and started out into the bay where the schooner was lying. We rowed as cautiously as if she were indeed a pirate ship, barely dipping our oars in the water. When we reached her, her sides seemed to tower up over us.

My chum held the boat while I took off my boots, crept up the rope ladder, and stole across the deck. I got safely down into the black fo'c'sle, where the

snoring all about me sounded like the noise of some terrific wild beasts; I grabbed up my basket, climbed out of there, and went down that rope ladder at top speed. We rowed to shore a lot faster than we'd gone out; but my satisfaction was somewhat dulled when I reflected that I was now a runaway seaman, liable to be picked up by the authorities at any moment.

We lay low for a while, and then tried everything we could think of to secure berths for both of us. There just wasn't any way to work it, however; our money gave out, and we were always dreading the police; so we finally agreed he should go home and I would take the best place I could find. Consequently, I was shortly in my first real berth—on a little coasting schooner bound for Stockholm.

The entire crew consisted of only four men. I was supposed to be part cook, part seaman—and I knew nothing about either. Moreover, I had my introduction to seasickness as soon as we hit the swell of the Gulf. My God, that is a terrible thing. Short-handed as we were, I had to do my work, no matter how much like dying I felt.

Of course, that's the surest way to recover quickly, and, in spite of everything, I took to the sea as if I had web feet. I watched the other men, listened to the strange names they gave to ropes and gear, and asked questions when I dared. I soon discovered that a fellow can do almost anything other men do, if he keeps his eyes open and his mouth shut and just goes at it. It was a proud moment for me when I stood my first trick at the wheel and felt I was in control

of that clumsy little craft, bowling along before a fresh nor'west breeze.

We got to Stockholm. I had scuttled about Gefle, but that was the first real city I'd ever seen; and when we sidled up against the dock, and there was the King's palace looking right down on us, I felt myself a Man. This was life and the big world. And when I was paid off and went ashore with seven crowns of my own earnings in my pocket, my clothes were hardly big enough to hold me.

I swaggered up the street, putting on a sailor-man's rolling walk, and when I boarded a trolley car I was conscious that the people were all staring at me. The truth was that I'd had a bad boil on my neck, and a rough-and-ready operation on it had left me looking as if I'd been in a knife fight. One elderly man spoke to me:

"Where do you come from?"

"Helsingland," said I proudly, and I smiled inside to see him draw back. For that is a district up north of my home, where the men have a reputation for being terribly rough and quarrelsome customers. The very word means fight.

"Well," said he, "you look like one of them. You're a sailor, aren't you?"

"I am."

I could never describe how happy that made that overgrown boy of fourteen. My troubles had vanished as if they had never existed: I was just a young Viking out on his first trip to conquer anything he met.

That didn't last so long—about as long as my seven

crowns. A little less than two dollars; and you have to pay for your lodging at the Seamen's Institute or get out. It was winter. No ships. "What will I do?" I thought to myself. Things began to look bad.

Presently I was walking the streets, broke and half starved. I managed to sell some little personal belongings; there wasn't enough money for a feed, so I thought I'd invest it in newspapers and try to sell those.

I was very lucky that first evening: the man who sold at that corner regularly was sick, so I had it all to myself; in an hour or two my papers were all gone, and there was enough in my pocket to give me my first square meal in several days and a bed at the Institute. My spirits went up again with a bound; I could make money, even on shore; there was nothing to be worried about in the future. But the next afternoon, when I started in on the same spot the regular vendor came along and kicked me out.

That upset all my calculations. I sneaked back to the Institute, trying to hide that bundle of papers under my ragged jacket. The manager laughed as he saw me sidling across the front room.

"What've you got there?" he asked.

"Newspapers."

"Have you turned newsboy?"

"Yes, sir. I had to make money somehow."

"Come inside here," said he; and then he made me tell him the whole story.

"Where are you from?"

"From Helsingland."

"Let me see your certificate."

I showed it to him. "Well, they breed good stuff up north there," said he. "Go ahead. As soon as I can do anything for you I'll not forget."

His interest helped to buck me up. Next day, however, I was in a fix. All my small capital was in that bundle of unsold newspapers. I just couldn't afford to be stuck with them, for I had no money to buy a fresh supply. If I was to eat they had to be disposed of. Anyhow, news was news a lot longer than one day up where I'd lived, and they seemed perfectly good to me as long as they were fresh and unread. So that afternoon I found a free corner and started in selling newspapers a day old.

Several people bought them and hurried on, paying no attention to the date. Then, all of a sudden, I felt a hand grab me by the shoulder. I twisted around, and there was a man holding the sheet he'd just bought from me. He looked angry, too.

"Here!" he shouted at me. "What kind of papers are you selling?"

I showed him my bundle.

"Why, these are all yesterday's papers!" he said. "What do you mean by swindling people in that way? I'm going to turn you over to the police."

By this time there was a crowd around.

"Look here," I said. "Don't do that. I got stuck with these and didn't have any money to buy fresh ones."

He was hard. He kept tight hold of me and swore he was going to see me in jail.

But some man in the crowd spoke up for me: "Oh, let the kid go. What does it amount to, anyhow?"

I saw a policeman coming along to see what was up, and I was on pins and needles. The man who held me was wavering: he saw the crowd was against him.

"Do you want us to take up a collection to return your three cents?" somebody called out.

That made him ashamed. He let me go, and it didn't take me long to dodge away. But that experience gave me enough of selling papers. I took a job selling chocolates and cheap candies from a push-cart. I pushed that thing for miles and miles, till I knew every street in Stockholm. Sometimes I'd live at the Seamen's Institute, and sometimes in cheaper places; and there were times when I stowed away for the night in any hole I could find. One way or another I got through the winter there.

Warm weather came again. Shipping began to move. My friend at the Institute got me a berth aboard a cargo steamer bound for Tunis. On the return trip she docked at a port 'way up in North Sweden, where I left her.

There was a travelling German circus in town. I had to do something, so I got a job taking care of the five horses. They were nice beasts, pleasanter to sleep in the stall with than a lot of men I've met in fo'c'sles. I was tough and ready for anything, and it wasn't a bad life, travelling from town to town.

When we were coming south on the railway, however, the circus man, whom I'd told about myself, said to me:

"We're coming to Bollnäs. I expect you don't want to be seen there, do you?"

"No, I don't," I declared.

"Well, you can lie down in that big box till we go by," he said.

So I passed through Bollnäs station lying in that box in the circus train. It was nearly twenty-five years before I was there again.

When we had finished the northern circuit, this circus proprietor took me along with him to Copenhagen. There was nothing permanent for me in that business; so after a while I shipped again on a vessel which landed me in England.

I had a miserable time in Hull. I was staying at a boarding-house where the manager made a regular business of shipping out seamen, taking an advance payment from the captain against the bill for board. If there was no berth for a man and he got too much behind, out he went.

I'd made up my mind I wanted to go south. I fancied I might find what I was looking for down there somewhere, far beyond the North Africa of which I'd had a glimpse. Soon I was ready to take anything. But there wasn't anything. And this boarding-house crimp didn't hesitate to chuck me into the street. There were bad days then—days of hunger and cold and wet and complete discouragement, when I envied the dogs who had a kennel to sleep in and a bone to gnaw.

Then I heard of a ship sailing for South Africa. The way the sailors spoke of her wasn't encouraging:

"damned old tub" and "hell ship" were about the mildest descriptions. But I was so desperate to escape from all that hopeless mess that I didn't care what kind of packet it was. Nothing could be worse than being out of work among those foul lodgings and that merciless gang who lived by sucking the life out of seamen.

The vessel was a Danish bark, loaded with some evil-smelling black stuff in barrels. It proved to be easy to sign on, for none of the older sailors would touch her, and the ten men the skipper finally scraped together were all youngsters.

We lay there in the harbour, with strict orders against anybody's going ashore on any excuse whatever, and the stories I heard about this craft and the officers were enough to frighten anybody. Worst of all, they declared the mate wasn't fit to handle a ship; he was an ex-skipper who hadn't been to sea for ten years but had been a boarding-house keeper. They prophesied he'd wreck the bark the first storm we ran into.

That sounded serious. We were supposed to sail in three days, and the officers kept such close watch there was no chance to duck out. So another fellow and I shammed sick. We thought if we got sicker and sicker for a couple of days the skipper would decide we were not worth bothering with, or at least we might get our feet on land to see a doctor and vanish. But he was wise: he knew his own reputation, and was on the lookout for such tricks. The first thing we knew, two days before the time set, we heard the

capstan going: up came the anchor, up went the yards, and we were off. Even the men on deck believed we were simply moving to another dock. Instead of that, we stood out of the harbour and were at sea, started on our seven-thousand-mile journey around the Cape of Good Hope.

As soon as we were well outside, we two "sick" ones were called aft. The other boy went down first. Presently he came out: his face was a wreck.

"Look out for yourself," he whispered to me, "or that brute will murder you."

Then it was my turn.

I might have been all right for that trip if I'd allowed him to manhandle me as he started in to do. He was a small man, about forty, but wiry and hard, and a slave driver. When he began to knock me about, telling me he'd soon cure me, I couldn't stand it; I fought back, fists, feet, teeth, anything. Of course, he was too much for me, and he kept singing out: "If you let out one scream I'll see that you have a taste of hell on this trip." I wasn't thinking of screaming, only how I might give him back something of what he was giving me. We had a terrible struggle all over the cabin, but he laid me out, and then we were all turned to.

That was an awful trip. It was my first experience in a square-rigger, but I soon got on to that part. The skipper was on my back all the time, sending me aloft in heavy blows and trying to break me down. I'd been aloft before, and I found I belonged on the topsail yard just as well as anywhere else; but I made

up my mind that I would leave the vessel and that bully the first time we came to port. Most of the others felt the same way.

Then we struck heavy weather down along the African coast, and the old bark behaved like the rotten tub she was. In one big blow a topsail yard carried away. The mate wanted to wait for better weather to replace it, for it was still blowing great guns and a bad sea running; but the old man wouldn't hear of it. He took charge himself and drove us to the mean job. It was a ticklish matter to get the new yard up and fast to the slings, because the old bark was wallowing and pitching so we could hardly stand on deck. Then the whole watch tailed to on the hoisting tackle, with the skipper dancing about and cursing our clumsiness. And somehow, what with the wind and the heave of the ship, the yard came loose when we had it almost up; it slipped out of the slings, crashed down on deck, and caught the skipper a swipe that broke his leg. I don't believe there was a man in the crew who didn't say, "Thank God!" secretly or aloud, when that happened. At least it meant we'd be free from his driving for some weeks.

Three and a half months that voyage took, mostly months of needless suffering and brutality. Down in the tropics the water got so low we were allowed only half a cup apiece a day—and that stank so a man would ordinarily turn up his nose at it. The food was disgusting, weevily biscuits and half-rotten meat. You couldn't take any pride or satisfaction in anything

about the old tub; and always there was that sense of a brute in charge who liked to make everything as hard as possible for us, and, on the slightest pretense, was ready to stretch a man cold on deck. Long before we got to Mossel Bay I swore that when my foot once touched land, wherever that might be, I would never again serve aboard this vessel.

Near the Cape we ran into a succession of terrific gales. It really didn't seem as if that old bark could ever last through them, for the seas were like mountains and gave her a battering that seemed sufficient to sink her.

At last, however, we worried our way around the Cape and stood up to Mossel Bay. The storms hung to us, and the sea was so rough we had to cruise back and forth for three weeks, waiting for signals from the lighthouse that it was safe to try the passage.

It was a welcome sight when we finally saw the flags that spelled out, "Come in." That narrow entrance to the harbour, and the trees and houses, with hills rising up in the distance, looked like heaven to us after what we'd been through.

The skipper knew well enough how disgruntled we all were, and he took every precaution to prevent our getting away. The men were forbidden to go ashore, and there was a watchman on the pier, night and day, to give the alarm if we made a break. The ship was to discharge some cargo there, and then was bound for the West Indies. I had no intention of making that trip with that vessel and captain.

We were a mixed lot in the fo'c'sle: Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, Finns, and Germans. Only one man was as much as thirty years old, most being boys of seventeen to twenty. We talked the situation over whenever we got a chance while the unloading was going on. We had tried to make a complaint to the consul, but that was just laughed off; and I found nearly every one of the men was anxious to escape if there was any way to pull it off successfully. Some of the natives had filled us up with yarns of how elephants chased policemen through the streets, and we fancied the whole country was full of fierce wild elephants and lions; so most were in favour of making our attempt in a body, not singly.

As for me, I was bound to leave if I had to swim for it, and leave everything I had, and travel alone. It made something rise up hot inside me just to hear the captain's harsh voice. It wasn't for this I'd left my home, and frozen and starved and been kicked about in Stockholm and Copenhagen and Hull. Not that I was ready to give up and crawl back to my family at Bollnäs. That was done, forever. There had been one time when I was in a terrible fix—didn't know where I'd sleep or where my next meal would come from—when I got a letter from my sister, sent to the Seamen's Institute in Stockholm. "For heaven's sake," she wrote, "come back, or let us know where you are." Having got by that moment without giving up, there was no danger I'd ever again be tempted to return.

No. I still had an unreasoning faith that in some

new part of the world there was waiting some work which was peculiarly my own, something I could do which would make living a pleasure. I was an ignorant boy, with very little education: this promise was misty and vague, without definite form. But while I had no idea what it was, I had now learned several things it wasn't. Some deep part of me still answered inevitably to the call of the sea; but I knew it was not a seaman's life I wanted. The hardships didn't bother me, but the monotony—one might as well drive a trolley car. Just working the ship, the same old damned thing over and over, with no real responsibility, no meaning. And then to be absolutely in the power of brutes who were a little worse than my two butchers at home—that would spoil anything; it stopped me even from the ambition to work my way up till I became a captain myself.

So I must keep going, to fresh corners of the globe. There was so much of it, all so new, so strange, so mysterious, on ahead, that I was bound to find my own place.

Meanwhile, the first job was to get clear of this present floating prison; and I was afraid to wait much longer, for it would be just like the skipper to pull up and sail days before the date he gave out. There were seven of us younger ones, practically the bulk of the crew, who were going to make the break together; for while the rest were not so bitter or so determined as I was, they were all thoroughly disgusted with our experience on that last voyage.

While we were trying to figure out how we could

get past the watchman on the dock, a Norwegian sailor came down in the fo'c'sle one evening for a talk. He was on a passenger boat, a coaster, which was tied up alongside. He was very sympathetic, because some of us were from his part of the world, and he volunteered to call this watchman into the galley of his ship for a cup of coffee that night, so as to leave the coast clear for us. He would close the galley door as a signal, and we must wait for this so as not to get him into trouble.

Night came dark, very little moon. For a couple of hours I lay flat on my stomach on the after deck, peeping through the skylight at the captain and mate, below in the cabin. They were going over a cargo manifest, and I thought they'd never finish. The rest were forward in the fo'c'sle, getting our bundles ready—all but one who was on the lookout, watching the light from the coaster's galley door.

At last those two in the cabin finished, put their papers away, yawned, and had a drink. They went to their bunks. The lights went out. I crept forward and down into the fo'c'sle. It was all dark, but I could hear them whispering nervously.

"What's up?" someone asked.

"All right aft," said I.

Presently the lookout climbed down.

"Galley door's shut," he said.

"We're off, then," said I. "Come along, and be quiet about it."

We stole up the ladder, across the deck, over the side. The dock was deserted: our Norwegian friend

had done a good job, and the watchman was enjoying his coffee inside. In five minutes we had left the wharves and shipping behind. In another fifteen we were through the town and striking out into the open country and freedom. We hadn't more than well started when one of the fellows began to limp.

"By God, I can't walk," he complained. "I got boils."

He and one other turned back, but five of us kept right on.

All that night we walked. We hadn't the least idea where we were going—just away from that ship. When morning came we were up in the hills; we turned off into a piece of woods, drank at a clear little *fontein,* and slept all day. That became our routine, for the sun was hot and lazy, while the nights were surprisingly cold.

We had many alarms. In our ignorance we fancied there were elephants and lions and all sorts of wild beasts roaming around who might spring on us at any moment. One night in particular we all raced off in a panic and were separated a long time because some big animal came close and we heard its breathing. It was probably a cow, but we were sure we had just escaped from a man-eating lion.

Our food soon gave out, and we didn't dare to show ourselves at any farmhouses or even at one of the many Kafir huts, for five strange white men on foot would have been sure to start inquiry, and we were determined not to get caught and sent back before the ship sailed. I think the only white men we

spoke to during these weeks were a few Boers, who came along driving their big wagons with half-a-dozen span of oxen. We'd see them sometimes far below, toiling up the steep, twisting mountain roads with their heavy, creaking vehicles. They were always kind to us and more than once gave us a feed or a ride. But while we could circle around villages and avoid meeting people, the food problem got serious. I learned how to creep up to the Kafir kraals like any night marauder and then crawl into the patch of garden truck and root up sweet potatoes in the dark. They were filling, but we got mighty tired of them and nothing else.

Once in a while we managed to grab a chicken, and that meant a feast day, as soon as we could get to a solitary spot to cook it.

We were so sick of sweet potatoes and so ravenous that one day, far from any houses, when we saw a solitary ostrich in an open field, we all stopped and looked at it with the same idea in our heads. We had watched these strange, awkward, big creatures, walking freely about, even following us along the roads, and had wondered at them. Now, however, this one was no longer funny.

"I say," said one fellow. "There'd be a lot of chewing in that."

We were five boys, not one over twenty, tramping for days, without a square meal for ever so long. The sight of all that meat made our mouths water.

"Come on," I said. "We've got to catch that bird. There's enough on him to feed us a couple of days."

I suppose that big fellow was a stray from one of the ostrich farms; there were no others in sight. Anyhow, he was the wildest one we'd seen yet. We surrounded him and closed in; but as we tried to grab his neck he gave a kick with one of those sinewy legs that sent one fellow sprawling and groaning, and trotted off. We were after him, more cautious this time, but he broke through time and again, and I couldn't get close enough to club him with a stick I'd picked up. When he chose to run, he left us behind like a galloping horse.

It was wild country, no one to bother us, and we spent almost an entire day chasing that lively dinner. Finally we saw we couldn't circumvent the wise old bird, and we were exhausted, so we had to sup on cold sweet potato as usual, and turn in still hungry.

We must have gradually drifted off to the northeast, for at the end of some weeks we were in rough mountain country clean over toward the outhills of the Drakensberg. Our shoes were worn out—I had thrown mine away altogether—our clothes were dirty and ragged, and we were a footsore, weary bunch.

There was a little town ahead.

"Let's go in and get some real food," said one fellow. "I've got a bellyful of this."

"Sure, why not?" chimed in another. "The ship has sailed long before this; they can't get us back aboard that hell packet."

I saw we couldn't stand it much longer, and it did look as if we were safe about the bark. So I agreed. Hardly had we reached the middle of the village,

looking about for a place to eat, when a mounted trooper rode up and told us we were under arrest as runaway seamen.

We were loaded into an ox wagon and started along the zigzag mountain road to the larger town where they had police headquarters. We came through a narrow pass in the range, where there was a tollgate, with an old Swede in charge. He had a bunch of youngsters around, and he sympathized with us and gave us something to eat.

We weren't worried after we got our bellies full. We'd made up our minds that our ship was far at sea without us, and that was what we had been trying to accomplish. When we reached the town, however, to our surprise, they clapped us in jail.

The authorities at once telephoned Mossel Bay. They were told that at that very moment when their inquiry arrived our ship was vanishing on the horizon! The jailer was good to us, and he brought us the news. The cheer we sent up was heard all over the prison. By that narrow margin we had missed being dragged back and turned over to our angry skipper. And we could imagine what would have happened to us, one and all, on that following voyage. We slept contentedly that night.

Next morning we were taken before the magistrate. I was still barefoot. He was a pleasant, red-faced old chap. He looked us over and then he burst out:

"Good heavens! This man hasn't any shoes. Why don't you give him something to put on his feet?"

He simply couldn't understand a white man going about South Africa in bare feet, and it had been hard going at times, but my soles had grown as tough as a Kafir's, so I hardly thought about it. In fact, when they hustled out and brought me a pair of rubber-soled shoes I wore them while I was in court but took them off later and hung them over my shoulder.

Well, the magistrate heard the testimony and that the bark had sailed. There was no other charge against us except desertion. Presently he turned to us.

"I'm going to set you boys free," he said. "You Scandinavians make good citizens."

They turned us loose, and the whole town entertained us. Then we started back on foot for Mossel Bay.

Our friends there greeted us warmly. "Well, by God, you did it," they shouted as we drank bad luck to the skipper and the Danish bark. We were sorry to learn, though, that our Norwegian friend had lost his good job. The skipper had kicked up such a terrific row that the facts came out, and our friend in need was fired. We never saw him again.

Now we had to find something to do. Two of my companions got jobs on a tug to Port Elizabeth; the Finn, the Dane, and I started to walk to a neighbouring port, where we heard there was more shipping. On the way we stopped at the government nursery, managed by a Swedish forester. He gave us dinner and some money; but it seemed to us really funny that he could no longer speak Swedish: he could write letters to his mother, but he couldn't understand his

own language. That struck me as one of the queerest things I'd come across yet. I little dreamed that some years later, in this very country, I was to find myself in a mighty tight place from exactly the same cause.

We reached the village we'd heard of, and a Norwegian schooner came in. The captain was a nice chap: he didn't need us, but he signed us on without pay for the trip to Delagoa Bay, in Portuguese East Africa. There he thought we could find a ship.

I didn't care much for Delagoa Bay. The country around was swampy and full of crocodiles, and where there were plantations they didn't appeal to me There was nothing in a farmer's life to make me settle down to its dullness. Then there were frightful thunderstorms with lightning that turned night to day. I did like swimming in the bay, taking care to keep away from sharks; and I liked the palms and the tropical feel of things. I imagined that what I was looking for must be in the tropics somewhere. So I was excited when the captain sent for me and said:

"I've got you a berth on a Liverpool bark."

"Where is she bound?" I asked.

"Australia."

That sounded all right. I remembered from my schoolbooks that Australia was full of strange things; and then on those maps it seemed to be surrounded by hundreds of islands with romantic and mysterious names. Really I had to take anything which was offered, for the Norwegian captain couldn't use me and couldn't put me ashore in Portuguese East

Africa. Anyhow, I was keen for it. It was moving on, and I felt it was in the right direction.

I signed on this Liverpool bark, for the first time as A.B., drawing about three pounds a month. I was the only foreigner aboard; all the rest were English. I was proud of my new rating and picked up a lot I hadn't known about seamanship: I could splice rope, and tie any sort of knot, and handle myself aloft or at the wheel. I was proud of the ship too, one day in a storm, when we were driving with three sails up, and we walked past a steamer doing fifteen knots.

Still, it was more like making a passage than any opportunity. Great as the difference was between this well-kept, beautiful ship, handled by decent officers, and that miserable Danish hell ship, I no longer had any ambition to spend my life as a seaman.

So it was an exciting moment when, after a month's voyage, during which we had a lot of heavy weather, we came into harbour at Bunbury, Western Australia.

CHAPTER VI

FROM POSSUMS TO PEARLS

HERE I was in still another continent, wondering what Australia would have to offer me.

What the first sight of it did was to make me run away once more. The contrast between the slavery of fo'c'sle life and what I imagined might be just beyond the horizon was too strong. That runaway business had become almost a habit. This was the last time, however; for while I still had some tough times coming to me, I never again put myself in a position where I had to run away. There is something most galling to a man's self-respect in the complete

subjection of a sailor before the mast to the officers; and the feeling that if he considers himself abused or doesn't like his conditions, he cannot leave without being liable to be picked up by the police smacks too much of jail for my taste.

Anyhow, two or three days before the ship was to sail I went over the side, and straight through the town of Bunbury, and out the other side. (I learned afterward that the mate skipped too; but he waited till the last moment.)

There was a couple of million square miles of wild land and unexplored desert ahead of me, and the total population of Western Australia averaged only one man to about four square miles; there ought to be plenty of opportunities for a husky youngster, not afraid of work, in that sort of land. Besides, I had picked up English on this last vessel and now spoke it pretty well—that language comes naturally to a young Swede—and that gave me lots more confidence.

I walked and walked. It must have been for weeks. There were some big ranches, and an occasional sawmill, but I passed big stretches of forest. I hadn't made any plans, hadn't even asked what there was back there, didn't have a map: it was just stepping out into the unknown to see what would turn up.

The first thing of any importance to me that turned up was a friendly Finn who was on the move himself. We fell to talk.

"You looking for a job?" he asked.

"I'm looking for something to do; but I don't want

to work for anybody. I'm not afraid of work, but I'd almost rather be a vagabond than sell myself to any other man again."

"All right," said he. "You come along with me. We do some ring-barking."

We set out.

"You can swing an ax?" he asked.

"Ought to be able to: I used to cut the wood at home from the time I could lift one."

"Good. You will soon learn."

"But what is this ring-barking you talk about?"

He explained that the pioneer farmers were always cleaning up tracts of virgin forest there in this manner. You take an ax and make a shallow four-inch cut all round the tree; the bark falls off, and by the third year the tree is dead and probably flat.

We tried various farmers: there was always plenty of the work—somewhere else. I heard there was one of my countrymen some distance off, and I started to look him up. The Finn didn't care to wait for me, so he went on his way. I'd had about enough tramping to last me for a while and was anxious to get at something. This Swede proved to be a superior sort of man; he'd been a naval architect in London, had come out here, gotten his 160 acres free, and was trying to turn it into a farm by his own efforts.

"I have no money to hire labour," he told me. "But there's a place beyond here where they want somebody to ring-bark a big tract. It's all fenced in. Go and try that fellow, and good luck to you."

Off I went. But when I reached the house I found another man had taken the whole contract and started to work. I walked out into the woods and found he had his tent up, with a cookstove and everything. He was a big, slow fellow, a native Australian.

"Are you the proprietor?" I asked.

"No—I got the job."

"Well," I said, "that's all right with me. But it's quite a contract here: why can't we work as partners?"

"Partners, heh? Squarehead, ain't you?"

"Yes, a Swede."

"Been a sailor, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"What do you know about ring-barking?"

"I think I can swing an ax."

"Ever do any of it before?"

"No. I can do it, though."

"Well," said he. "Tell you what I'll do. I'll pay you two-and-sixpence an acre, if you want to try your hand at it."

Sixty cents an acre didn't sound like a fortune. But I wanted to go in on equal shares with him, so the first thing was to show him I meant business. So I accepted his offer and started in. This was a tremendous hardwood forest, mostly jarrah, a kind of eucalyptus. They ship lots of it as timber, and it's wonderful wood for lasting; they say a post in the ground or a dock pile is good after fifty years. All the owner of this piece wanted, though, was just to get rid of it in the cheapest way possible.

The first day I didn't earn enough to buy me a mess of baked beans: there was a knack to the operation, and there were a lot of these big trees in seventy paces square. It went better next day; and the third day I really got on to it.

That night I said to the Australian: "Give me a contract now for a certain number of acres."

"Say," said he, "you seem to like work. Are all you squareheads as crazy about work as that? You needn't worry: you'll have a chance to peck away at these bally jarrahs till you're sick of the sight of them."

What I had in mind was to speed up, now that I understood the job, and catch up with him. He'd had quite a start when I arrived; if I could show him presently that my finished acreage was equal to his, he'd be willing to have me working with him instead of for him.

He was a good-natured, easygoing, half-lazy sort of chap, who really liked yarning better than driving himself at chopping. It wasn't a week before I caught up with him, start and all.

He was surprised.

"By God!" he said. "If I could just get me a gang of wild Swedes like you, boy, I could set down all day and smoke my pipe like a gentleman."

So he took me in as a full partner on his contract with the owner of the land.

There was quite a lot going on in those lonely woods if one had time to watch it. I kept noticing some strange-looking creatures, bigger than a cat,

crawling up and down the trees and disappearing in holes.

"What kind of animals are those?" I asked the Australian.

"Them's possums," said he. "If you could only get a dozen of them to walk up and hand you their skins, you could get twelve or fifteen shillings for them over to Bridgetown."

"As much as that? Can't you catch them?"

"Oh, some fellows go in for snaring them. But, hell, it's too much trouble."

"Do you know how they do it?"

"Yes, sure. Get some string and wire and I'll show you. God knows there's enough of 'em round."

He taught me the trick of it, and I set some snares. You could tell by the marks on the trees whether an animal was travelling up or down. When he was due to descend you fastened the end of a six-foot length of sapling to the trunk, with the other end slanting into the ground. The snare was set just where this sapling led him away from the trunk: instead of leaping over it he'd stick his head through the wire loop, the other end being fastened to the sapling runway.

I spent a week experimenting and putting these out. The possums were so plentiful, it wasn't any trick at all to take them. Before long I'd come in of a morning with a dozen of the beasts. The Australian was surprised.

"By God," said he. "You're doing pretty well at it, boy. But, hell, it won't last."

It did last, though; and my pile of skins mounted

till I could see that they were going to do almost as well for me as the ring-barking.

"What you need is some boomero skins," said the Australian. "Them's the fellows that fetches the price."

You couldn't go anywhere through these woods without hearing these boomeroos—giant kangaroos. They grow bigger than a large man and travel in tremendous leaps, fairly making the ground shake when they hit. But they were wary and wise. No matter how often I heard them crashing through the bush, by the time I got to the spot they were gone. The underbrush was such a thick tangle, I never so much as caught sight of one, and it finally got on my nerves that though I lugged around a gun loaded with buckshot all the time, I couldn't get a chance to shoot at anything.

One morning, early, I was making a round of my snares. I came to a big piece of swamp, without trees; beyond it an open grassy plain stretched away. Quite a lot of cattle were grazing there; the tinkle of their bells sounded as they moved slowly about. As I sat watching them, hot and tired, I saw there were quite a lot of these big kangaroos feeding with them. They didn't seem to pay any attention to the cattle and would allow them to come right close.

That made me angry, after all my wasted efforts.

"If I was only a cow!" I exclaimed. And all at once an idea hit me, and I was tearing back to our camp as if I were quite fresh.

The Australian had a couple of pack horses, and

he had bells on these to find them when they strayed in the bush. I grabbed one of these and ran back again as if I were crazy. When I got around the swamp I tied the bell around my own neck, and walked out among the cows, giving the thing a jerk at every step so it would sound.

All of a sudden I passed through a bunch of the cattle—and there was a half-grown kangaroo, sitting up and looking at me, shifting from side to side. I threw up the gun and let him have it, and he rolled over. I don't believe any elephant hunter was ever prouder of a big tusker than I was at that moment.

The beast was heavy, but I managed to lug him back to camp. The Australian was fast asleep inside, snoring away at a great rate. I fastened the kangaroo up with a cord just over him, then stood outside and gave a wild yell. Up he jumped—and the beast came down on top of him.

When he came to his senses he burst out laughing.

"How'd you get it?" he wanted to know.

"I discovered something."

"Well," said he, "look at this bally Swede. Wait till we finish this contract: by God, this'll be a story to tell!"

I explained about the bell, and he laughed to kill himself.

"I believe it'll work," he said presently. "Come on, we'll see about this."

There wasn't any ring-barking finished that day: we hunted kangaroos from morning till night.

A month later, when we'd finished the job, we

started out of the bush with two pack horses loaded with kangaroo and possum skins.

At Bridgetown, half the village crowded into the bar when they saw what we had. That Australian knew how to tell a yarn: he started in about a wild Swede running away from his ship and tramping through the bush, and in a few minutes he had the crowd doubled over with laughter. The story was all over town.

The best part of the tale to me was that when we'd collected our contract payment and sold the skins, I had fifty golden sovereigns, the biggest amount I'd ever possessed up to then. I had made a money belt before leaving camp, and when I put these gold pieces in it and strapped it round next to my skin it sent a glow through me. It wasn't just the fifty pounds, big as that looked: this was my first venture on my own. The satisfaction of it made me firmer than ever in my resolve not to work for others but to find something bigger and more permanent that I could tackle independently.

Much as I studied over it, this thing was still round the corner. As before, I moved on.

I caught a train back to the coast and got off at Freemantle. For some time I waited around, talking, and asking questions; there were plenty of easy friends so long as you had money to stand beers, but they couldn't give me any idea. I tried Perth.

Getting no inspiration here, I thought a bit of education might help to direct me, so I started to go

to night school. There was a good teacher, and he improved my English a lot; also taught me some geography, which I needed.

Presently I struck up an acquaintance with a peddler who'd been selling cheap watches through the country. I think he was really an Arab or a Malay, but he called himself a Hindu. He was lonely and very bitter about Australia as a poor place for a workingman or a small trader. Up in the Moluccas was the place where a man could make a fortune, he declared, and he painted those islands as a place where sovereigns lay about under a man's feet. He'd picked up pearls there for next to nothing, and after he made a trip back home he was going again.

No doubt he was a plain and fancy liar, but he soon had my boy's mind crazy. I soon found he wasn't a cadger; he would hardly let me pay for a drink—unlike a lot of my white "friends," who were always hanging about for somebody to set up a round—and I would listen to him by the hour.

Pearls, and diving (though he knew nothing about underwater business), and trading with the islanders, and easy life under a coconut tree—it was just like one of those romantic fiction books. I began to dream about those coconut trees and swarms of beautiful girls behind the trees. Probably the girls looked even better to him than to me. Anyhow, the combination of them, and the easy, pleasant, independent life, and the possibilities of making a fortune were more than enough to convince me that I must take a look at the

Moluccas for myself. I had tried repeatedly to land another contract for ring-barking but hadn't succeeded. Now my heart was no longer in anything of the sort. I went back to Freemantle and began to inquire about ships bound for the Moluccas.

In spite of my last schooling, my geography was still hazy enough. Two thousand miles, northeasterly, would have taken me right into the middle of that group: if I'd worked around to the north coast, say at Port Darwin, it'd have been comparatively no trip at all. Even if I'd had that clear in my mind it would have done me little good; and besides, I'd heard such terrible accounts of northwest Australia that I had a horror of getting stranded there.

The only ship I could hear of was bound for Ceylon, and that was thousands of miles west and north. However, I had to be moving on, and of course my money was steadily getting less. Even if I could pay for a third- or fourth-class passage, it would be disastrous to land broke. I was puzzled, but something must be done.

One night, at the bar, the skipper of this Ceylon vessel was standing beside me, and I mustered up enough spunk to tell him I wanted to get there but couldn't pay passage. He asked me, "What are you?" I didn't tell him I was a sailor, because that would have settled me with him, so I made up something. However, he couldn't do anything.

The barman was friendly. He'd overheard and he asked if I had any money left. I told him, "Yes, a little."

"Why don't you offer them a few pounds to let you stow away? You keep on telling that story and you'll land someone."

It worked. One skipper finally took three pounds and told me to go aboard and say nothing to anybody.

I did—simply walked on and hid in one of the storerooms. When we had pulled out to sea I came on deck. The skipper saw me and gave me a wink. I thought he'd put me to work, but though he signed me on, I had nothing to do. It was a long trip, and nothing happened. When we tied up at Colombo I just walked ashore and about my business. No passports in those days before the war. You could go anywhere.

This was a new part of the world to me, very different country from anything I had seen. From the time when we saw Adam's Peak rising far up among the forest-covered mountains, long before we sighted the lighthouse, it seemed like a scene in a cinema—especially the elephants working, and the buffaloes ploughing in the rice fields, and flamingoes, and in the water those astonishing "flower parrots," fish that are blue and crimson and purple, gray and green and yellow, with black stripes. It looked different, felt different, smelt different.

As soon as I landed I went to a show; then I bought a white suit and a solar topee and rode around town, taking it all in. I felt like a gentleman of leisure.

It didn't take long to give me enough sightseeing, particularly since that belt of sovereigns was growing altogether too light about my waist. Besides, I was

bound for the Moluccas. That was quite a big archipelago to aim for, but anywhere in the Moluccas would suit me till I could determine if there was anything there to hold my interest.

It was simple enough to find out that from Colombo there were three lines of travel in that general direction—to Manila, to Surabaya in Java, and to Thursday Island. Surabaya looked to be the best bet. But, just as back in Freemantle, the difficulty was, how to get passage there without signing on as seaman and having to take French leave once more.

I remembered the barman's advice, which had already proved good—and which, I may say, I have tested many a time when I was in straits and never yet had fail me: "Just keep telling that story and offer a few pounds."

This time it was slow enough in operating: there weren't many vessels sailing, and they all seemed bound for Shanghai or Hongkong. I got terribly anxious as my little hoard of sovereigns became smaller and smaller. Before luck changed I was living almost like a bally native on nothing a day, in order to hang on to a few of those sovereigns which were my only chance to work out my dream. There were times when Ceylon seemed an oppressive, stifling place, and I had the sensation of being stranded on an island with no means of getting away. Still, when that came on I'd go for a swim or talk to someone.

I had worked out a regular system. I would sit on that hot little wharf at Colombo, and when a vessel came in I'd find out where she was bound. When the

captain went ashore, I'd trail along behind him: I became familiar with all the ship-chandlers' stores, and bars, and every other place they frequented. The most likely hunting ground was in the little private bars back of the hotels; here I'd hang around, talking, scraping acquaintances, ready to stand treat when it was my turn. Even my story became so familiar that, once started, it reeled itself off automatically: how much I wanted to get to this place; and how I was stranded here without enough to pay for a passage; but if two or three pounds . . .

A captain ashore after a voyage, with a drink or two under his belt, is generally good-hearted and sympathetic—especially if you look halfway decent, and can buy in your turn, and do *not* tell him you've been a fo'c'sle hand. Yet it was a weary procession of them that I sounded out before I succeeded.

At last my time came, and my man—as they always do if you stick. This skipper was for Surabaya. He listened to my story and was human about my fix.

"Why don't you pay your passage?"

"Only got a few pounds left. But I've got three sovereigns here I'd be willing to give to get there."

I had the gold pieces in my fingers. His hand went out for them as I made a motion to hand them over. Then he seemed ashamed of taking it.

"Oh, hell!" said he, brushing my hand aside. "Forget about that. You step aboard, and it'll be all right."

I was delighted. "That's fine," I exclaimed.

"Mind you, though," he went on, "you go below and don't come on deck at all. Stay right down there

It's a long trip—you'll have to make friends with one of the crew."

"This is going to be a tough passage," I thought to myself. Still, I'd worked too hard for the chance to let it go by now. "All right," I agreed.

"We'll have a drink," said the skipper. "And remember, from now on I don't know you—never laid eyes on you."

A matter of three thousand miles ahead of one, in the tropics, under these conditions, was enough to make anybody nervous. I wondered if I could see it through. By chance I met a sailor ashore from this very ship. He was broke, and I never saw a man appreciate a few drinks more than he did.

I explained the situation to him without saying a word about my talk with the captain. He didn't hesitate a second.

"Where is your grip?" he asked. "Go get it and come aboard with me right now. If I don't land you in Surabaya it'll be because we strike a reef or a hurricane."

I was travelling light: I had hardly anything except one extra suit in this little handbag. My new friend picked it up and took me on board.

He suggested I should stow away in the chain locker, but that was too cramped for such a length of time in that climate: a white man would have been fried in his own grease before the voyage was over. Finally he fixed me in a decent space in front of the fo'c'sle and agreed to bring me water and food. Pretty soon we were off.

It was a hard passage, for my cubbyhole was but a few feet square, and I could go on deck to get fresh air only at night. However, I slept all day and sat on deck all night, and this man would come and talk with me when he had a chance; and at length we reached Surabaya.

Then the question was, What next? I had very little money left, I knew nobody here, and didn't speak Dutch or Malay. Yet I must find a boat bound across Flores and up to the Molucca Sea somewhere.

At my friend's suggestion I stayed on board with him, but my attempts to get some information ashore were failures; and as the day approached for this ship's sailing, my case looked rather desperate. The sailor knew the language and a few words of Malay; he took me about, to every schooner and proa in the neighbourhood, and there was a lot of jabbering while he asked questions. The only result was the knowledge that nobody wanted a man. I hardly recall a time in my various adventures when I felt so lost and hopeless: no outlook, money low, my only acquaintance about to sail away, and I with nothing in prospect but to be chucked ashore in this strange island where I'd probably be in trouble right away with the authorities.

The last afternoon came. The sailor and I stood by the rail, talking it over. He had no more suggestions, and I was at the end of my rope and ready for any recklessness.

A little trading schooner had tied up alongside just temporarily.

"That fellow's bound for Banda," said my companion. "He's going out this evening before we do."

A sudden resolve came to me. "I'm going aboard her and hide away," I declared.

"Well," said he, "it's a poor chance. Better, though, than the inside of one of these Dutch calabooses."

We went below, and I got my bag. He gave me a bottle of beer and a parcel of food. When nobody was around I slid down the ladder, dropped on the schooner's deck, and in two shakes I was down in the hold.

Nobody disturbed me. I went to sleep and was unconscious when the schooner sailed.

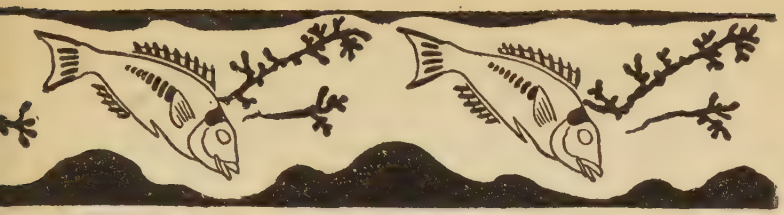
Chance, luck, is certainly one of the queerest things in the world. Who would have ventured to guess that this blind, crazy choice of a last chance was the precise thing which was to carry me to all I had hoped for and more?

Surely not I, even had I been thinking at all. As it was, I slept, while the schooner took the wind and bowled along east through the Java Sea.

END OF BOOK I

BOOK II

FINDING: THE WONDER OF ISLAND LIFE



CHAPTER VII

WAKING INTO A NEW LIFE

I WOKE. It was morning, even in the disorderly, cluttered, smelly hold of the island trading schooner. The hatch was still off, and a square splash of sunlight lay beside me, shifting slightly as the vessel lifted and fell to the easy swells.

At first I had no idea where I was. My ducking aboard this strange boat the evening before had been an impulsive act of desperation; there had been no knowledge, no discussion, no study of possibilities; and, with the happy-go-lucky carelessness of youth I had slept dreamlessly the night through. So it was

hardly surprising that, coming out of this profound stupor and finding myself in quite unfamiliar surroundings, I staggered to my feet, stepped into the light, and gazed curiously upward at the sky and mast visible through the opening.

Suddenly there appeared over the edge of the hatch coaming a face and half a body—so startling and inhuman that it would almost excuse my imagining, in my fuddled state, that I had waked in that hell the old-time preachers used to describe so vividly. A huge mop of frizzled black hair stood out around a powerful black face; through the big nose was thrust a splinter of white bone; on naked breast and arms were great cicatriced gashes raised into welts and forming a sort of pattern. (I've been told since that the number of these, which take the place of tattooing, sometimes indicate the number of sea voyages the wearer has made.)

Wild black eyes stared down at me in as complete astonishment as my own face must have shown. Then the huge Papuan—as I afterward learned the apparition was—let out a yell, which sounded to my boy's ears like the very crack of doom. I should hardly have been surprised to learn the next moment that I was to appear as the chief delicacy at a cannibal feast.

In a moment there were half a dozen more faces beside him, of as many widely different casts of feature, and of every shade from light brown to black, gazing in surprise down into the hold. I looked

up, and they looked down, each of us wondering how this miracle had happened.

I had seen too many strange and novel sights in the past two years to be easily terrified: as my wits came back, I realized this was merely an ordinary trader's crew, picked up here and there from among migratory islanders. Even then there was plenty to be nervous about. I knew only too well that the brutality on which some skippers prided themselves in dealing with seamen was nothing compared to what might be handed out to an unwelcome stowaway. Such a one had put himself outside all law and protection—and that situation is like strong drink to some cruel-minded officers. So I was prepared for anything unpleasant as I stared up and waited for the next event.

Then, to my relief, one of these savage-looking creatures burst out into loud, childish laughter, showing his white teeth. I smiled back, somewhat uncertainly. And at that instant the fellow turned sideways and jabbered something incomprehensible. A new and most different person appeared: a calm, yellow-faced Chinaman.

That moment ought to be marked with red chalk in the calendar of my existense—the instant when I saw Chung-Ko.

Our eyes met. He had all that extraordinary self-possession in the face of anything astonishing which ignorant people ascribe to lack of feeling. But as I looked at his impassive countenance I had a sense that this was a human being one could trust. I smiled

at him. Immediately his mask of a face broke up into an answering smile. He motioned to me to come up.

I climbed on deck. He said something to his Number One, and the latter herded the crew forward. We stood face to face. I knew I'd done a terrible thing in making free with his boat, and I felt he had a perfect right to treat me like the sea tramp I was. Instead of that he looked at me as if he were pleased —not that drawn smile you get from some Chinamen, which you know is quite different from whatever is underneath: there was a real, kindly laugh on his face.

He pointed to me and then to the shore off our starboard quarter.

"Take back?" he asked.

"No, no." I shook my head.

"Back?" he suggested again, making signs.

"No. No back, Uncle." I didn't know what to call him, and that came out naturally. Back in Perth there were just a handful of Chinamen—they're not allowed there; I used to go into one little shop to buy lottery tickets, and all the Australians called the old proprietor "Uncle" because they couldn't pronounce his name; so that was my name for any middle-aged Chinese. Besides, this man seemed almost to belong to me, from his manner.

"No want?"

He seemed puzzled, and we went to it, trying to understand each other with just a few words of English and filling in with signs. He'd traded up north and picked up a bit of English: "One time me speak good," he said. "Now—nothing." Presently we were

down in his cabin, helping out these means of communication with charts and matches.

What he was most anxious to know was where I was from and why I had stowed away. I expect he was afraid he might have trouble with the Dutch officials, who carry things with a high hand. He'd throw his arms about and ask: "Surabay'?" Then "Singpo?" and so on. That went on for hours, until I got what he was after. Then I'd put a match down: "I Perth"; next, "I Colombo"; "I Surabaya." Finally I made him understand I was a wandering sailor, not a resident of Surabaya or a tourist about whom the authorities would kick up a fuss.

When this was clear in Uncle's mind he beamed and laughed as if someone had left him a fortune. He took me right in as if I were a guest he'd been waiting for, gave me a bunk near his own, and treated me as no man had in six years. I shall never forget that wise, friendly, smiling Uncle, or cease to wonder at the blind luck which arranged that I should have tumbled into his boat, instead of any one of ten thousand others which would have apparently caused me to miss the life work waiting for me. He, to begin with, and many others later on, quite spoiled for me that phrase Europeans and Americans use to express final approval—"He's a white man"; for I never met with a "whiter" man than that slant-eyed yellow trader of the islands. He was the very first human being since my father's death who appeared to take enough personal interest in me to find pleasure in helping me find what I was after. I hope he is

happily honouring the spirits of his ancestors in that suburb of Shanghai from which come he and all his enterprising fellow traders of Southern waters.

There was never a suggestion of my doing any work: it is really impracticable and unfitting for a white man to work in a native crew; besides, there were plenty of them to do everything. So I was a passenger as the schooner loafed along across Flores and Banda seas, on her thousand-mile trip, with the last of the southeast trades.

I slept on deck. I liked that better than being below. Uncle and I ate together, and he began right away to teach me to use chopsticks. His chief food was rice and fish and nuts; he would laugh and laugh at my first struggles to handle fish with those chopsticks. Of course, we had knives too—a Chinaman cuts up any solid food with a knife; but to pick out the bones from fish and get rid of them, that's quite a trick for a novice with chopsticks. However, I learned the knack quickly. We were like two boys over that. There was no difficulty about getting fresh fish: in most places you simply had to toss a hook overboard.

I never saw a man so fond of nuts. He had lichees and every other kind. It was really funny: after a while, as soon as he began to hand me these nuts, which he considered such dainties, I knew he wanted me to play dominoes with him. He had a lot of time to fill in on such passages, and I could see how eager he was when he began to teach me a complicated game (it may have been mah jong); I soon got the idea, and we would play as if our lives depended on

it. He always won. I learned afterward that, like most of his race, he was an ardent gambler. He was a good business man, too. You can never tell about a Chinaman's affairs, but I fancy he was quite well fixed for money. He was keen about everything, would make me say English words and repeat them over and over, to help him in his trading.

He had a station on Banda Neira, just below Ceram, and we had a hold full of trade goods: canned goods and cloth and matches and what not. He was particularly interested in musical instruments, cheap accordions and harmonicas, and he liked music and singing himself. He taught me one of those Chinese singsongs that you sing up high through your nose and keep on forever: I know the air still, but I've forgotten most of the Chinese words in the many verses. A little later on that song was to be the means of bringing me one of the three friends who meant almost more to me than anything else that's come into my life.

We made a line at first for Macassar, on the southwestern tip of Celebes, though we didn't intend to stop there. Those are tricky waters, with ten thousand reefs and little islands, and currents you have to watch out for all the time, especially when the season's changing. There are sudden winds then too; but the natives can almost smell those weather changes coming, and there's always some little lump of an island to dodge into till it slackens. We'd put in anyhow occasionally, for water and fresh provisions.

At one of these stopping places I found myself

staring down into the water. It was five or six fathoms below us, over coral formation and clear sand, and you looked right down into the most amazing and beautiful place. It was like all the flower beds of the earth—flowers which moved about as well as grew quietly, for the many different kinds of fish were just as gaily coloured as the plants. I became absolutely fascinated. If there were only some way in which a fellow could get down there and investigate it all close at hand!

After that I would spend hours hanging over the rail, or lying flat up forward, peering down. It wasn't long before Uncle noticed me.

"No shell here; no shell," said he.

There were lots of shells of various kinds, all about "See," I said, pointing to some.

"No shell," he insisted. "Bymby seeum."

That evening he studied me with those clever eyes. I knew him well enough by then to tell that he was stirred up about something.

He pointed at me: "Down? Go down?"

"Yes. I like go down."

He seemed to get more excited and sputtered out a lot which I missed the point of. I kept telling him there was nothing would please me more than to get down there. At last I remembered watching the divers at work on vessels in various ports, so I told him:

"I go down with suit on. Suit like diver's," making all sorts of signs to show a helmet and the rest of the outfit as I recalled it.

Uncle was quick to catch on to anything; he smiled all over and tried to explain something about the place where we were going. That wasn't clear to me, so he repeated over and over:

"Bymby. Go down. No shell here. Bymby. Soon."

I began to understand that when he, or anybody else in that part of the world, spoke of "shell" he meant pearl shell. Evidently, too, there was something waiting at Banda which would make everything all right.

That didn't make it any less pleasant to sail through that beautiful archipelago, where you could sometimes smell the spices 'way offshore. There is no place in the world equal to it except Tahiti, either on the surface or under the sea. I became more absorbed than ever in what lay beneath the water. One of the crew had a rough home-made water-glass, a sort of long box with a glass in the end. He brought me this, when he saw me so taken up with looking below, and I spent most of my time, when we were in shallow water, watching the bottom through this affair as we slipped noiselessly along.

FROG FISH

CORAL AND SEA ALGÆ

CHAPTER VIII

THE BLUE GROTTO UNDERSEA

BY THE time we reached Banda I had a pretty definite idea that while Uncle himself knew nothing about diving, he had something at his place there which was to enable me to go under water.

In point of fact, he had bought a wrecked pearling lugger some time before, had got a diving outfit along with her, and ever since had been looking for somebody to try it. From my interest in the bottom he formed an idea that I knew something about the business, and inside he was as much worked up as I was, because it meant a big chance for him.

It was night when we slid into the harbour between the three islands, with an entrance on either side. We came right ashore to Uncle's house. The air was heavy with the fragrance of nutmeg, for this is the original home of the nutmeg tree and almost the entire surface of the islands is planted with them.

I couldn't pay any attention to such matters: I was too eager to solve this mystery, which seemed to have tremendous significance for me. I fidgeted about for half an hour while the men brought a few things ashore to the house. Then I tackled Uncle.

"Now let's see what you have."

His eyes shone. "Yes, yes. You lookum," he said.

With that he got a lantern and led the way out into the back yard. He stopped at one of a group of sheds and fumbled with the padlock. Presently we were inside. It was crammed full of all sorts of plunder: boxes and bales and tins.

Uncle pointed to one corner where this conglomeration was not piled so high.

"You lookum," and he handed me the lantern and went back to the house.

Scrambling over the piles, I reached that corner and hung up the light. I ripped the covering off a square box. Yes! It was a diver's helmet! The big front glass gleamed like a huge fish's eye as the light fell on it. That was one of the exciting moments of my life—though naturally I had not the faintest idea of just how much it did mean to my future. I worried a place clear on the floor, and strainingly lifted out this bulky contraption of tinned copper.

Now the question was whether we had the rest of the outfit or not. I became as busy as a terrier after a rat. The heavy boots, of leather, wood, lead and brass, and the forty-pound weights were loose in a cluttered pile of stuff. The rubber-and-twill suit was wrapped in burlap in another big catch-all box. After a long search, and barking my shins on a couple of boxes, I found the air-pipe and life-line hanging on a peg behind some mats; and I could see what must be the pump under another pile.

Then I got really busy. I must have shifted a ton or two of this trading stuff, piling crates and boxes and bales up to the roof in some places, before I could get a clear space large enough to lay these different parts out on the floor and try to figure them out.

I was sitting down with the helmet in my lap, studying the valve, when a slight noise made me turn. There stood Uncle. His black eyes looked mighty bright.

"You sabe? You sabe?" he asked.

"Sabe bymby. I sabe plenty bymby," I told him, and he disappeared again while I tackled the contraption afresh in a concentrated effort to understand how it worked.

While I had seen divers at a distance, I had never examined the gear, so I was forced to work out the principle for myself from the very beginning. But a sailor gets into so many situations where his life may depend on doing things, and there's nobody but himself to do them, that he can hardly avoid becom-

ing a handy man. As I turned every screw and valve and stopcock and studied the thing, I began to get a dim picture of how it worked.

I was at it for hours, all alone in that rickety shed, with only the light of the smoked lantern. More than once I was conscious of somebody hovering in the darkness by the door, but was too deeply absorbed to pay any attention. It must have been late in the night when I heard Uncle's voice behind me:

"Go bed," he commanded. "You sabe? Sleep now."

That seemed sensible. I found I was tired enough, so I turned in. I didn't sleep a great deal, though; and long before anyone else was stirring next morning, I was out in the shed fussing with this gear and checking up the notions I had formed.

After we'd had something to eat I hauled all the parts out where I could get at them better, hooked the holes in the collar on the screws of the breastplate, tied the sleeves tight at the wrists with cord, connected all up, and started to heave on the pump handle. It was very stiff, but some of the "boys" standing around lent a hand. They heaved until the pressure almost blew the suit to pieces, but I found out some spots where air was escaping and patched those up. I also saw just how the clamps and the inlet and outlet valves worked.

For a day or two I did nothing but experiment with this gear. Every piece that would come apart I had off, taking great pains to memorize it exactly before I unscrewed anything, so I could put it back again. I cleaned and oiled every surface, tried the adjust-

ments. Before I finished I could almost take the whole thing to pieces and put it together blindfold.

So when Uncle asked me, "You makeum allight?" I nodded. "Yes, I'll try," I said, though I felt rather shaky over the idea.

"Sabe plenty," said he, grinning.

We were going over to another little bit of an island of the group, Run, sou'west of Wai, which was a short sail west of us. The schooner was loading in a lonely place, away from the other vessels. While we were waiting I got all this gear down to the beach. There were a number of the crew standing about, so I decided to slip into the thing and begin to get accustomed to it.

The boys had a lot of fun in putting it on. The suit looked big enough for two like me, but the sleeves were a problem: my hands and wrists simply would not go through the openings. Finally I wet my hands and rubbed some slime over them, and managed to force them through. Then they put the helmet over my head and clamped the breastplate down. I had not arranged any signals, just told them to pump air for me.

Out I walked, along a sloping bottom, into four or five feet of water, where there was a nice shelf. I noticed that as I went down the air rose further and further; the dress seemed to close up on me. Also, if they pumped steadily I was blown up too much.

I arranged about that as well as I could, and began by going down on my knees and ducking under the water. The air coming to me seemed very queer, not

at all like outside air. My ears began to ring, too. I worked the regulating air valve and tested everything I knew about.

The boys were pumping away; they began to get tired before long, and every now and then one of them would sing out, "Finish! Finish!" But I kept at it for an hour or more, until I saw that everything worked pretty well. My greatest trouble was with those forty-pound lead weights. I had hung both of them to the breastplate hooks, and left them in front, making me so heavy forward I felt all the time I was about to fall on my face; I shifted them one way and another, but it wasn't till I took the suit off and studied it there on the beach a long time that I saw the purpose of the guide hooks under the side glasses of the helmet, and figured out how to secure some sort of balance with these weights fore and aft.

Something happened to prevent our sailing that day. And there was a group of new boys who joined the crew, who seemed very anxious to make friends with me.

I didn't realize how much all of them thought about shell and how important a place the diver holds in their minds. Still, I was more than ready to take advantage of their willingness to help. I spent hours out in the water, ducking under and testing everything.

At first they worked the pump too fast. I discovered that if too much air came I was lifted off the bottom; if they turned slowly, I sat down more heavily. I began to time them, standing up, waving my

arms for them to pump, then sitting down: it became clear that they could work the pump very, very slowly in a place like that, and I would be just right.

When we established this rhythm, I went deeper, into six or seven feet, with my helmet just showing. I started bobbing up, or sitting on the bottom and springing to the surface. The black boys thought that was fun; they would laugh and call out. I would close the outlet valve and rush these few feet to the surface, partly for fun, partly to keep them pumping, for sometimes they'd get lazy, or start talking, and let my supply go too low.

Two whole days I kept at this. Nothing went wrong; everything worked perfectly; I still didn't have the weights adjusted properly, but I could manage somehow; and I began to feel quite at home in the thing and more anxious than ever to give it a real trial. Uncle was immensely pleased. He smiled and smiled and kept saying:

"Velly good. Velly good. You sabe plenty."

Presently everything was straightened out again: we put the diving gear aboard and sailed for Run. We reached the bit of an island and anchored off the long, narrow coral reef.

"Uncle, let's get in closer. Then I go down," said I.

"Allite, allite," said he; and he had his Number One put the schooner in as close as we dared. We could see the bottom, in two or three fathoms of water.

There was no ladder or anything, so I rigged up a rope ladder down which I could climb. The outfit

was so heavy and cumbersome, especially those weights on top of everything else, that I had to have the help of two men to climb over the side.

Hanging to a rope, I let myself down a way. It didn't go so well; up I came again and fastened a weight to the rope's end. The schooner was swinging about, and the weight wouldn't hold my rope in place; but I went down a little way and up again half a dozen times. Inside, I was nervous enough. But of course a white man couldn't give himself away before natives; besides, I knew how anxious Uncle was to use the outfit for getting shell. He was on deck, watching every move I made. Nothing had gone wrong so far, either. I screwed up my courage.

"I'm going down to the bottom," I vowed.

And down I slid.

There was one islander on board who had taken special interest in my preparations. He had helped in everything and wouldn't allow anyone but himself to tend my air-pipe and life-line. I had with great trouble arranged a sort of signal code with this tender: so many jerks on the line meant "Pull me up"; another number, "More air." I'd only thought of having to ask for more air; it hadn't occurred to me I might get too much in that moderate depth.

But the pumpers kept going too hard, right along; so when I reached bottom I found myself fighting this buoyancy all the time. It wasn't bad enough to make me feel the pressure, but it made manœuvring so difficult that I came up and arranged another signal for reducing pressure.

Down on the ocean floor again, with the help of this and my regulating valve, I was able to stand, holding to my rope. Everything seemed fine—till I began looking out at a distance, when I experienced a kind of creeps.

As I looked about and took a few uncertain steps I could see extraordinary fish swimming along or darting away from me. I didn't feel very comfortable.

After I had made myself wait there awhile, I came up. The men helped me over the side and took the helmet off.

That fine old Chinaman was standing there, beaming at me:

"Sabe good," said he. "You down velly plenty. Get plenty shell bymby. You velly good."

Then he felt my muscle as I got out of the suit: "Strong. Sabe good, you. Plenty good."

He made all this fuss just to encourage me and to impress the crew. Certainly he succeeded. I felt I was Somebody.

Really, that was the first time in my life I ever felt so. Everybody was gathered around, talking excitedly, for pearls are what men mostly live for in that part of the world; and while I couldn't understand their Malay jabber, they were all discussing pearls and diving. Uncle was as excited as any of them; he knew where there were plenty of beds of shell, and he'd dreamed of getting at them without having to buy.

And I was the one man on board who could make all that possible! I tell you, I felt like a little master.

In fact, from that moment I was a different person on that schooner. They all needed me. They were pleased to have me. In this essential department I was absolute boss. That's quite an intoxicating drink at eighteen.

It brought some responsibilities, however. I kept saying to myself: "Now, you'll ruin everything if you're not careful." I decided I would take my time about it, not go down too deep till I could meet up with a professional diver who would give me some tips.

I used to fuss over the collar of the suit. "No very good; no very good," I'd say, shaking my head over it. They thought I knew all about the gear, as I wanted them to; in reality I was mighty nervous about many things. The gauges, for instance, I didn't understand at all. It was a London gear, and these English marks on the air gauges were a Chinese puzzle to me; all I knew was to tell the men to pump fast or slow.

We moved around this group of islands, trading. My desire to go down again grew stronger and stronger. Besides, the only professional diver I could hear of was working a long way off: there didn't seem any chance for instruction unless I waited indefinitely. At the end of a week I had to do something about it.

I asked Uncle to get a couple of canoes; we could put planking across these and rig the pump on that.

He puzzled over the idea some time.

"No shell here. No shell," he objected.

"No, but me try. Me try," I explained.

"No good try. No shell," he insisted again.

"Me try very good here," said I.

At last he got my notion through his head, and he was quite willing to be all ready for the shell beds when we reached them.

The men brought out two canoes from shore. We built a stout platform across them, swung the pump down on this, and rigged it. There was plenty of help; we had a lot of extra natives, making passage from one island to another; I was a pretty fair carpenter, and everybody was willing—lots of youngsters eager to lend a hand at the pumping. Even at that, we spent an entire day in getting the thing ready for use.

Though it all happened twenty years ago, I can recall vividly just how nervous and wrought up I was when we started out next morning on this improvised catamaran. I was afraid of the gear still, there was no one to consult, and I knew it was up to me to see that no accident happened.

First I went under in a very small depth and walked about a few minutes. Rising to the surface, I looked over all to see that it was working smoothly and cautioned my tender to look out for the signals. Then we moved out to the deeper water, thirty or forty feet. I realized that all up to now had been mere preparation: this was to be the first real dive.

I slid down my weighted rope till I stood on the bottom—then stood still in astonishment. All my other experiments had been off sand beaches, gener-

ally with a fairly even sloping sand floor. This spot, on the contrary, was in the midst of coral formations, and the novel beauty of it hit me like a blow. In fact, though I've been down since then thousands of times, probably in a thousand different places all over the South Seas, I really think I have never come across a more strikingly beautiful place than this spot which I dropped into by the merest chance.

All about me was a sort of fairyland—something like what one reads of as a child, entirely different from the surroundings one has always known, strange and fascinating. One had a sense at once that these branching coral formations were alive, though they could be leaned against or walked on.

Most extraordinary of all was the colouring. It was like something incredible a stage magician does before your eyes: when you looked, it was one colour; as you walked closer this shifted into a completely different colour. I could not understand this; I was continually going to examine some spot which attracted me, and by the time I got there it was altogether another spot.

Then the fishes! In that crystal water I could see clearly for probably a hundred feet, and every instant there were fish of all shapes and hues, moving slowly about or darting here and there. A school would flash into a hollow of the rock coral, and when they swam out again they had changed colour.

As for the coral, it took on all the colours of the rainbow. The sun's rays, shooting down from the surface, and, I suppose, broken up by the little waves

dancing there, produced effects like those of the stage, where powerful lights of different tints transform the scenery; and there was a glitter where they pierced the moving water.

The whole thing had an eerie, unnatural quality; and this was heightened by the behaviour of the fish. Some of these were most curious: they would swim up close to me, stare at me with their goggle eyes, then with a swift twist dart off like an arrow—to return again in a moment, if I kept still.

And I was still for a long time. It seemed sufficient just to sit there motionless, looking at all these bewildering sights and trying to adjust myself to this startling new world.

Anyhow, I was still uncertain about walking around a great deal, for there was a current running, and I was not sufficiently accustomed to the costume to be sure of my steps. So I spent most of the time sitting on a ledge of coral, watching this Arabian Nights display I had landed in, until my helper had signalled me three times to come up. Then I ascended and took off my helmet for a breathe and rest. But after a short spell I had to go down again.

This undersea region was so fascinating, seemed to promise such an endless list of surprises and novel sensations, that it drew all one's thoughts.

I was determined this time to explore a bit. I ordered the men to follow me with the canoe, whichever way I went, by the stream of bubbles which rises from a diving suit. The water was so clear they could see me directly most of the time, anyhow; but I didn't

intend to have any accidents, so, as an additional precaution, I posted one man with the waterglass to keep watching my movements.

As I reached the bottom I realized there was an inlet just opposite this spot; that meant I was exposed to any deep-sea creatures that might be roving about. Confidence was growing all the time, however. I started out boldly, the craft above shifting its position as I advanced.

It was then I discovered the Blue Grotto.

I was walking along slowly, somewhat bewildered by the flood of new impressions which all these sights brought to my mind, when I stopped short, gazing ahead incredulously. I could have sworn there was a great cathedral ahead—windows, and tall columns, and—yes, actually: light shining out of these windows!

My brain was ready by this time to accept almost anything. Probably, too, the oxygen supply was stimulating my thoughts. Going a little closer I sat on a shelf of coral and considered this extraordinary phenomenon.

All sorts of queer fish kept forcing themselves on my attention. They were unlike any species I had seen, the oddest shapes and the most startling combinations of colours—performing that baffling trick of altering to other combinations. They were as different as human beings: some slow-moving little fellows would plod up, halt, and stare at me with solemn round eyes; others would dart close, check for one glance, then double up and rush frantically off;

others were cheeky, like boys hanging around till they could muster up enough courage to do a bit of mischief and run for it. Now and then a bigger fish would sail along, and at that all these small varieties would whisk out of sight, around corners or into holes.

It was precisely as if I had landed on another planet. Things were not hard and crude as they were on the surface. Though these larger fish must feed on the small ones, it was like an exciting game when they chased each other. And everything else seemed dreamily quiet and beautiful beyond what I had ever seen or imagined. Especially that fantastic structure beyond there.

As I went forward again, it more than ever suggested a cathedral or castle. Yet these grotesque harlequin fish were darting in and out, weaving between the pillars of the structure. Above, there were pinnacles; and this unearthly light gleamed inside and shot from every window. The bottom sloped downward from where I stood; looking up, I tried to figure how deep I was already. I simply had to investigate that building close at hand. In my hazy condition I accepted the idea that this was a structure built by human hands, or some hands, though what it was doing on the sea floor was puzzling.

Before going further I rose to the surface, marking the spot carefully lest we drift away from it, and took a spell in the open air on the catamaran.

As the boys took off my helmet they began to ask questions:

"What you see? What you see?"

"See something. Don't know what," I told them.

"What? What? You go down more?"

"More bymby," said I.

After a good rest I descended again.

It was about fifty feet down to the level of this "castle." I approached it, wondering about it just as much as ever. I seemed to be living a fairy tale: it no longer seemed extraordinary when I started to pick up some object between the coral and the abundant sea vegetation—and the thing moved in my hand. I had thought it a flower. I dropped it, however.

This castle formation was perhaps forty feet high; the topmost pinnacles were only ten feet below the surface. That same magical light shone through it and from it, strongest apparently just beneath the window openings. The fish passing in and out gave an impression of enchanted life and activity to the place.

There was a large doorway entrance. Watching my air-pipe carefully, I went through this.

Inside there was a great chamber with passages leading off from it. For a long time I hardly noticed the grotesque shapes of the formations along the wall: the amazing colour was all I could perceive.

Everything was blue. Not an ordinary blue, but a vivid, deep, startling colour which embraced every blue from light azure to ultramarine. It was as though I looked through blue glasses. The water was blue, the irregular walls seemed to have been decorated in

mysterious blues like nothing one had ever beheld; even my hands were blue. The swirl of a big fish close by hardly startled me, unexpected as it was: I was lost in watching this incredible blue where his frightened turn had churned it up.

Crossing the "great hall," I peered along openings that led in all directions. But I drew back with a shudder from one dark hole, where my glance showed me a mass of slimy, creepy creatures. I felt as if I were naked somewhere, surrounded by spiders. They were spider crabs, I suppose. Anyhow, they were horrible, and I came away quickly, glad to get back to the entrancing colouring and incredible shapes elsewhere.

Again it was time to go up. I rested and had some food on the schooner. Uncle was even more curious than my native helpers.

"You find something?" he kept asking.

"Find something."

"What you find?"

"Find plenty," said I.

He was puzzled, didn't know what to make of it: there was no shell there.

"Bymby look some more," I told him, and he had to be content with that.

Late that afternoon, as the sun was lowering toward the horizon, I was once more fifty feet under water, in the midst of these marvels.

To my surprise, when I entered the Blue Grotto that strange encompassing blue had vanished; more-

over, the colours of things were altering steadily right in front of me.

I began to understand about the lights I had seen shining from the windows, as I thought about this. It was the direct rays of the sun, penetrating into the Blue Grotto, which had caused that effect; and now I was seeing some of the spotlight transformations resulting from sunlight entering at different crevices and from changing angles.

Before my eyes the water and walls took on rainbow hues; the coral was red and pink and purple, a whole series of colours, each more beautiful than the last. The fish were undergoing a natural kind of camouflage: they glowed with similar changes, their stripes and blotches altered. That was an experience a man carried with him the rest of his days.

As at first, I fell completely under the spell of this sea magic. I was in the position of a man suddenly dropped onto another planet: after he'd goggled at the queerest of the strange new objects before his staring eyes, he'd begin to wonder how he could adjust himself to these new things and conditions. In addition, I was probably experiencing some of the effects of a forced air supply. Sometimes that'll cause a diver actually to go to sleep in his helmet; or it may act like one of those Eastern drugs which stimulate your imagination and lead you off through fantastic daydreams.

Anyhow, as I sat down there in that romantic

castle on the sea floor my fancy fairly ran wild. I saw my whole previous life—not continuously, but like chopped-off sections of a cinema reel.

Ockelbo. My boat and the lift of the heart at the freedom she brought me. Those gloomy, shadowed times before and after my father's tragic death. Then, a stray dog, nobody really caring what became of me. The narrow, stern face of my guardian, while that loathsome butcher, with his thick, greasy lips, lied about me—and was believed. The thin, fanatical countenance of a missionary, showing us children the pinched shoes of a Chinese woman, his voice shrill with holy horror as he told of the terrible heathen and their idols.

And here was I, fifty feet under the sea, with a canoeful of heathen savages up above, trusting my very life to their care while they pumped air down to me! Perfectly at ease and trusting to them! Whatever was the answer, I was better satisfied here than there.

Running away on skis through the deep forests above Bollnäs. Freedom again and the joy of it, in spite of bitter cold and hunger and fatigue. Shame of being dragged back, indignity of finding myself a prisoner. Then the relief of setting out into the unknown, searching for I knew not what.

Starving and freezing in Stockholm, in Copenhagen, in Hull. Filth and vermin and cruelty and curses. Wild animal life, suspecting every stranger, learning that the harsh hand of authority was always against me. Cold brutality of that skipper's face as

he set about battering me down till I should beg for mercy and cringe at his future look. Runaways and more runaways. South African tramping adventures —that big ostrich, pursued by five ravenous boys, sending the Finn sprawling with his powerful kick. Possum trapping in the Australian bush. The Hindu and his Arabian Nights tales of precious pearls and spices.

Always driven on by some obscure impulse, looking for something, some life that was really worth living, worth putting all one's self into.

Was it not this very thing before me? This was the first time I had found peace since I had started out on my own.

Here was a vast new, unexplored world—the whole floor of all the oceans from low tide down to the hundred-foot depth or beyond. A marvellous world, strange, beautiful, full of mystery; full of ten thousand things one wanted to know about; full of adventure; full, in places, of pearl shell and pearls awaiting the hardy diver who could win to them.

What more could I ask? Freedom and independence of action, activity and inexhaustible novelty, danger enough to keep one keyed up, to render a man proud of braving it. Just the everyday work made one a picked man.

Suppose I did find a monster pearl! Well, it would be fun to try being rich for a change. I'd get the finest gear in the world, become the greatest diver, go to depths no man had ever ventured. What a life, unrolling its promises! And what a marvellous train of chances which had brought me to this dazzling

moment, when such possibilities unfolded as the inevitable sequence of the morrows!

Up to this time I had never seen so much as a pearl oyster. That merely added one more excitement which the future had in store.

When the boys helped me onto the platform, I was still dazed with the vision. My doubts and uncertainties were over.

I was going to be a pearl diver. The greatest pearl diver of the island world.

We lay off Run about a week. Every day I would go down and explore here and there. My main purpose was always to get into this blue grotto, in the heart of my sea castle, sit down there and dream my dreams. When anybody would insist on knowing what I had discovered that took so much of my time, I would simply smile.

"Some day I be great diver," I would explain. "Must practise. Must work plenty."

I drilled my tender and the men at the pump, so that I knew just how to instruct them to have everything work smoothly. Generally I would stay down about half an hour at a time; if I overstayed this period very much the tender was trained to jerk the rope as a signal. I found this much did not affect me; my ears would ring occasionally, and once or twice the pressure caused a slight nosebleed; but I was growing more used to the under-water work all the time, and I was cautious enough to prevent any accidents. The air hose was apt to leak, and I learned to patch it up with tarred canvas.

Of course there was plenty to get accustomed to. At the start there would be times as I submerged when my head would feel as if it were in a vise, fairly splitting; it would be impossible for some moments to go down. I discovered this was not nervousness but the pressure on the eustachian tubes—much worse, naturally, if the men pumped too suddenly or hard. A man gets hardened to it with practice. As divers put it, he "gets his air." I found, too, I had to be feeling well and strong to dive; a man with a cold, for instance, just can't stand it.

I had no misadventures during this time. I had made up a knife in a sheath, and always wore this, but I never had occasion to use it then. When a big fish would dart past, I'd grab it; and the remembrance of those squirming, creeping sea spiders always made me alert for danger, even while I was indulging in my dreams. As it happened, I did not so much as see a shark. That helped to give me confidence while I was learning the tricks of the trade.

One day I stayed in this grotto so long that Uncle became nervous. They couldn't see me there, and I paid no attention to the tender's signals. There were a lot of new natives around, making a passage on the schooner, and it happened one of them was a good skin diver—something we hadn't had on board hitherto. Perhaps, in addition to his anxiety for my safety, Uncle thought he might satisfy his curiosity about this spot I was so fond of, for while I often tried to describe it to him and to explain what dragged me back there, he never really got the idea. He only knew

I no longer took much interest in the various games he tried to teach me. Anyhow, he ordered this boy to swim down and see if I was all right.

I was sitting inside the "castle," lost to everything except my fancies.

Suddenly I started to my feet and looked up out of the entrance. Something big was coming down through the water. I thought of sharks, and my hand went to my knife. Presently I saw it was a man, straining to force himself down. (He had already made one or two unsuccessful efforts.)

"Who in the world can that be?" I thought. And I was a bit chagrined: evidently I was not such a master as I had fondly fancied, if this brown man could match me without any protecting suit.

Down he swam, head first, arms and legs working vigorously. When he came close, I could tell by his face what a strain he was under. A string of little bubbles curved away from his nose and upward.

I made a grab for him, but he twisted like an eel, turned about, and shot upward again to the surface. Afterward, when I rose and took off my gear, he was sitting on the deck. He made signs that he was the one, and grinned at me like the youngster he was. The ability to dive deep is not very common, and takes long training to develop. In the Bandas the natives rarely go down more than twenty to thirty feet. Years later, at another island, I did see an expert skin diver swim down to a hundred and twenty feet, and I timed him for three minutes in all. But that was a stunt.

When I thought it over, I decided I had a lot of advantage over him after all: I could stay down and walk about half an hour or more, while two or three minutes was the absolute limit for a man holding his breath.

Uncle was immensely pleased as he saw me becoming skilful and at home in the water. He listened while I bragged of what I'd do some day.

"Bymby," said he, "you catchem big oyster. You open oyster, you find pearl. You catchem pearl in pocket; I catchem shell."

I saw that he was mainly interested in the shell. That's a standard commodity, pearl shell, of whatever grade it happens to be. I saw too that as usual this wrinkled little yellow man was a square-shooter. He knew all about pearls, as I was to learn later; and he was a born gambler—and no such person can resist the gamble of pearl fishing; but he was, first, and last, and all the time, bound to play fair, or something more than fair, with me.

Any arrangement he suggested would have been all right with me. I wanted pearls, but that didn't come first. I had decided now, quite definitely, that I had found what I was after.

I was going to become a great diver; perhaps going to find a great pearl. That really didn't matter so much. Whether that luck came or not, I was going to live a great life. I had already caught at the finest pearl a man can take out of the world oyster: work that he loves, that belongs peculiarly to him, that

leaves him at peace with the world and himself, yet makes his pulses beat just to think about.

If this new life work could be made merely to produce me a living . . . Well, that was the next point to be investigated.

PEARL OYSTER

CHAPTER IX

THE BIG PEARL

WE PICKED up and sailed away from Run. Instead of heading for Banda, however, we held southerly and then straightened out to the southeast, across the Banda Sea, toward Manuk and the Kei Islands. Then Uncle sprang his big surprise on me. We had talked so much by this time, and he had picked up so many English words, that we could understand each other much better.

It seemed that some months before, while he was on a trading cruise among the Arus, south of New Guinea, he had come across a pearling lugger

wrecked on a reef down toward Enu. She belonged to an Australian pearler, registered from Dilli, Portuguese Timor, who had a crew of Japanese and Filipinos; between them they had managed to pile her up in a blow. This captain had gotten ashore, and he was disgusted and wanted to sell the lugger and his diving gear and everything else.

Uncle was a shrewd trader. He kept hanging around, for he saw there was a deal coming, and he'd long wanted to have a diver working with him. He asked a few questions and showed no particular interest. Privately, though, he sent out some of his boys who were extra good seamen; they reported that they could easily salvage the lugger.

So presently, just as he figured, this skipper became impatient, white-man style, and Uncle picked up the whole business—for next to nothing, I fancy.

Then he set these black boys to work. They patched her roughly, pumped her out, floated her off the reef, and sailed her up to the Kei Islands, where he had decided to have her rebuilt. These Kei Islanders are the greatest boatbuilders in the whole Moluccas; Great Kei is quite a big island, with high mountains along its backbone and all sorts of magnificent timber; and the original people there are distinctly Polynesian in character, though they're all mixed up now with black Papuans and with Malays. Certain families have been canoe- and ship-builders for generations: they construct all those tremendous canoes for the New Guinea men, and they have almost a monopoly in building proas, because they have the right

timbers and the skill. They even build good-sized schooners, for they can get all kinds of wood for ribs and so on.

There was a lot of work on this lugger; Uncle had returned to Banda, left the diving outfit there, and gone on to Surabaya to stock up—when I dropped into his hold out of nowhere.

Now the repairs were completed. We were bound for the Keis to take her over.

"I give you one boat—nice boat," said Uncle. "Little boat, but nice."

He went on to repeat his former offer:

"You catchem pearl; I catchem shell."

As I said before, this was a mighty generous bargain. The total crop of shell each year from Malay Archipelago waters will average something more than twice the value of the pearls (in the South Seas it's four times as much; in Ceylon and the Persian Gulf only one thirtieth or so). But here I was, an ignorant boy of eighteen, just having picked up a little about diving, and contributing nothing except that little and my energies. He didn't figure it that way either: to him shell was a standard article of commerce, suitable for a steady trader; pearls were more a matter of luck, almost a gambling proposition —and I fancy he carefully separated his gambling, of which he was so fond, from his business.

"Mebbe so you catchem big pearl," he would say; and, keen bargainer though he was, I knew he was really thinking about me and planning for me, just as if I were his son.

You can guess whether I was excited as we slanted down with a fair wind on that two-hundred-and-fifty-mile run to the Kei Islands!

Most of my time was spent in trying to picture this boat. My mind went back to that beloved sailboat on the lake at Ockelbo, which had given me my first glimpse of what ocean freedom might mean: naturally, I figured this lugger as something between that and the smaller craft I had been seeing lately. That passage was nothing but successive visions of this rescued lugger.

What I was not prepared for, though, was her beauty.

We reached the island, and I didn't lose one minute in getting alongside this boat, lying there in the little cove where they had rebuilt her. You know how it is with boats—just as with women: some have all the virtues, you can depend upon them, they're all right, but they don't move you. And others . . .

This was a twelve-ton lugger, one of those magnificent boats they lay down at Thursday Island, where they understand the requirements of the work. There's no stauncher craft in the world than a proper pearling lugger: you can go anywhere in her, if there's a skipper in charge who understands her and the islands.

They hadn't painted her yet, but she was all completed, everything nicely finished, spick-and-span, a craftsman's job. She sat there in the water, absolutely still, but with life in every line of her, ready to go.

And the fellow who originally built her had put

that something extra into her lines which you can't describe: she was just a thing of beauty. The first sight of her made my heart beat hard. No explanation for that. As I say, it's the same way with some women: the minute you lay eyes on them something happens inside of you. That boat was mine, right away.

We set to with a will, and I drove those fellows hard. It wasn't long before we had the lugger all painted, stores and gear aboard, ready to sail on my first pearling trip.

Uncle gave me his own Number One boy, an excellent seaman. Also we had the luck to pick up an experienced diver's tender, who had been at it for years and years. At least, I thought at the time it was plain bally luck: looking back, I more than suspect it was one more instance of the careful, affectionate foresight which that wise old Uncle was ever employing on my behalf. You couldn't fool him about many things; I'm sure now he had seen through all my boy's bluff about diving and had been looking about in a quiet way for some expert who could give me a few tips without seeming to.

Certainly no one could have picked a better helper than this chap. He was from Amboyna, up next to Serang (Ceram) there, where he'd been born—the capital from which the Dutch Resident rules all this part of the Dutch East Indies. Pretty old, he was, but he was good: he could still go down himself in shallow water, but if a man starts as a tender he almost never becomes a diver: he sees too much

of what the diver goes through and is apt to say, "To hell with that." His great value to me was that he had known before I was born all the little things I'd been painfully trying to worry out for myself. I was no mechanic, whereas this chap could take a pump to pieces, grease and oil it, put it together, and keep it running perfectly. He understood all about those bothersome pressure gauges; every piece and gadget of a diving outfit and how it should be used; all that accumulated mass of practical knowledge, for every day and for emergencies, on which a man's life may depend at any moment in that work. Undoubtedly it was through his expert coaching and his masterly handling of details that I never had a serious accident.

That man was my right hand from the time he joined.

He could handle a lugger too, taught me a lot about that in those tricky waters, full of currents and reefs and whipped by sudden squalls. It was a sight to see him tending: nobody could talk to him then, unless it was orders; he took his job too seriously, knew what a slip on his part might do. Someone who knew must have trained him and made a job of it. Except my friend Ro, he was the greatest tender I ever had in all these years.

With this most satisfactory helper I made some trials at greater depths, down to seventy or eighty feet. Everything went like clockwork. No trouble. So we were off for pearls and shell.

My tender had some slight knowledge of shell

beds over by New Guinea, but he had been there only once, when he was a boy, and his information was sketchily vague. That's a wild coast of Dutch New

TAKING OUT PEARLS

Guinea, hardly a settlement for hundreds of miles, and though we were only two or three hundred miles off we could find nobody who was acquainted with it. So finally we just set out, on a straight course past the northern tip of the Arus.

The northwest monsoon was blowing steadily now;

that was just right for us; the little lugger waltzed us across in fine style, and I grew prouder and fonder of her every day.

Quite a way off shore, my tender announced we were over a bed. He had seen some small shell which he knew indicated there was pearl shell around.

I was over the side and down just as quick as we could get things working. I still had to find my first pearl shell. And that's one of the experiences a man remembers.

My eagerness soon had a check. I walked about, looking with all my eyes, moving from place to place over the uneven bottom: not a sign could I see of anything like pearl shell.

Somewhat taken aback, I went up at the end of my time. My tender insisted there ought to be shell somewhere around. After a rest, I journeyed down again and scoured all about. No results whatever.

The time that followed was maddening. For two whole days I stuck to it, drifting behind the slowly moving lugger, looking, looking, looking, exhausting my strength by my efforts, cudgelling my brains for some explanation. No use. I was somehow completely convinced the place was right: there must be shell somewhere, yet all my senses failed to discover it.

I was down there, sitting on a lump of coral, on the third day, pretty well all in from disappointment and fatigue and humiliation. What was I to do?

A few paces ahead of me there was one of the thousands of patches of vegetation. And as I stared at it, feeling I was about at the end of my courage

—something moved in it. There was a flash of a silvery colour.

"By God! What is that?" I exclaimed aloud, jumping to my feet.

I hurried to the spot. There was a big oyster in this patch, its shell so covered with growth and seaweed an untrained eye could pass within a yard of it and never pick it out! What I had seen was this oyster closing up, with just a gleam of its shell's nacred inner surface.

From that instant I was like a blind man whose sight has come back. Spotting that one oyster opened my eyesight. I stood there, looking around.

There was pearl shell all about me! Big fine oysters such as I must have passed hundreds of times in the preceding two days. I became suspicious of everything. "They may have some other tricks, these beasts," I thought.

Anyhow, I was on to this one of hiding from a beginner. It didn't take me long to send up some baskets of these elusive oysters.

Another step in my initiation came when, on the lugger's deck, I opened this first batch of shell. You can depend on it, no one else was permitted to perform that operation. I was trembling with excitement so that I nearly cut my fingers off with my big sheath knife. There is, of course, quite a knack about it.

In the morning, when the sun beating down causes the valves to loosen, even gape a bit, you hold one of these big shells firmly on something solid, pick

out a place, and jam your knife right down into the main muscle. The oyster contracts to one side; you cut clean down, give a sideways jerk, and disconnect it at that spot. The two valves spring open, for there's a black, elastic ligament at the hinge which operates just the reverse way from the central closing muscle.

Then you flip the oyster back and forth. As a rule you know right away whether it has anything for you or not. It is passed on to a man alongside, or opposite, who removes the creature and carefully feels about the lips; once in a while you hear him hiss—and you look up and see him taking out a little pearl. But in decent-sized shell it's surprising how probable it is to pick out everything right away.

Either the pearl will be in plain sight, often loose, or if it's of any size you'll notice the lump under the oyster's skin. Once in a while a big pearl will be located 'way in the middle; these and the little fellows are found by the helper.

As I say, I was shaking with excitement when I started in. But you don't remain that way after you've opened a dozen or so and found nothing. As I tested one after another, all without result, I became anxious. Where were these bally pearls I had been told about so often?

I stuck to it, opening and opening, there on the lugger's deck, till I had finished the entire first batch I'd brought up.

Not one single pearl did I have to show for the lot!

That was a facer. I thought of my deal with Uncle

—shell to him, pearls to me. "Gee!" I said to myself. "I'm out of luck at this game."

Still, I had such complete confidence in Uncle that I was certain it would somehow work out all right. Naturally, he couldn't just present me with a boat and crew and gear. I didn't begrudge him one ounce of all the shell he might receive under our bargain. But I did want some evidence that my end wouldn't be all hope and moonshine. Well, to-morrow would be another day. We'd see.

Next day I fetched up a big batch—there was plenty of shell, now that I'd acquired fish eyes and could distinguish it. More disappointment, as I kept opening and drawing blanks. At last, however, I gave a yell as I picked out an ugly baroque. It looked like nothing, and it was worth little more. But it was, generally speaking, a pearl. And it was the first thing I'd harvested from the sea which really belonged to me. Moreover, it was a promise of something better. My courage and resolution all came back. I was willing, even eager again, to see this thing through: out of enough chances, I must draw one lucky number sooner or later.

I kept on working, fishing up oysters, opening. A few small pearls and some seed pearls began to make a sort of show in my box. The heat was terrific at times, and there would be days when I'd have to rest up. I could see this life I had entered on wasn't by any means a soft job.

We ran short of water. It seemed a simple thing to go ashore and fill our barrels; but I discovered

not a man of my crew would do it. Not even my reliable old tender.

"No safe me. Those people kill," said he. "No safe any brown men. You white. You safe. They no kill white man."

I felt somewhat like the old story about the dog that wouldn't bite if you looked him in the eye: "You know they won't kill white man; say I know it too. But do those wild Guinea men know it?"

However, water we must have. I was captain. If the men were afraid to go after it the job was up to me. I sailed in, close to the beach as we could go, put a couple of water barrels into the skiff, took some polished shell along, and started to row toward shore. Uncle had warned me not to land on that coast without having somebody cover me, so I posted my tender on deck with the rifle we had along. He was to shoot the instant he saw anyone make a hostile move.

We hadn't seen a sign of life, but the men told me there were "plenty bad men," out of sight in the thick undergrowth, watching us every moment. The thought of those concealed eyes wasn't so pleasant as I rowed in; I looked back, and the picture of my reliable tender, holding the rifle so that it was plainly visible from the beach, helped a bit. Still, I wondered just what I was blundering into.

I landed without having the slightest evidence there was a human being within miles. Placing the barrels on the sand, I piled some of these polished shells beside them, got back in my dinghy, and waited.

A full half hour I sat there in the hot sun. Not a sound or a movement from the thick line of bush in front of me. Then, without any warning, about fifty naked savages burst out into the open. They carried spears and shields and all sorts of weapons. Covered with great scars and welts, with wild fuzzy hair, and faces like beasts, they seemed to me the most frightful creatures to call humans I had ever imagined. Along this coast you never know when you may land on a tribe of head-hunters or cannibals. I didn't much care for it, but I remembered my tender back there with the rifle.

These ugly beggars, like something out of a nightmare, stared at me silently. I motioned to the barrels, then to the pile of shells. Next I showed them the rest of the shell in the boat. They like polished pearl shell, use it for ornaments and decoration.

Well, they must have played this game before. After some hesitation they came cautiously down, picked up the barrels and the shell, and disappeared in the bush.

It was a long, weary wait after that. Naturally, I thought of the possibility that they might try to take me by surprise, and I was very much on the alert. But I sat in that dinghy three or four hours, and was becoming mighty impatient, when at last the whole gang of them broke out again, several carrying the barrels.

This time they marched right down to the boat and lifted the barrels in. They made some strange, gut-

tural noises, asking for the rest of the shell payment. I was just thinking that they weren't such a bad lot after all, when I looked about and found myself gazing right into the eyes of one particularly unpleasant individual. I can't describe what I saw there, but it was so horrible I shall never forget it to my dying day. It wasn't the clear, hard hostility of a wild beast, but something muddy, loathsome, indecent. You couldn't help the feeling that killing him would make the world a bit cleaner.

I handed over the remaining shell quickly and pulled away from there.

That was my introduction to New Guinea coast savages. I didn't find any great longing within me to cultivate their acquaintance.

We worked around here for a while, and then my tender told me we'd find better natives farther south; so we shifted down quite a distance, where the people were all right and it was easy to obtain water and fresh stuff to eat.

There were plenty of shell beds too, and I kept doggedly at my job. The northwest monsoon came on, and there'd be days when we couldn't fish but would have to run for shelter into some river mouth or behind a barrier reef. It was tough enough at times; I was pretty well fined down by the constant hard work, and no longer thought of diving as merely a dreamy occupation among beautiful wonders.

Moreover, at the end of four months, there was little enough to show for my end of the expedition. Uncle would come out well, there being a very satis-

factory pile of good shell in the hold, worth somewhere from eight hundred to a thousand dollars a ton.

Then, one morning, luck came to me again.

There was quite a rough swell on. The lugger was pitching about, rolling this way and that.

I was opening a batch of oysters on the deck. It was a job, to be got through with, by now. I could do it like a machine, thinking about something else. A man would watch closely, though, without realizing it, no matter how many thousands of times he'd done the same thing before.

Automatically I slipped in my knife, flipped the oyster over. The lips sprang apart. Something rolled out and dropped to the deck. Something big. A Big Pearl!

The lugger heeled over with a wave. The pearl rolled down toward the gunwale.

Like a cat I sprang at it, before any conscious thought came to my mind. I landed on my hands and knees and grabbed it, a second before it would have gone overboard again.

Trembling as if I had a fever, I looked at this beautiful thing in my cupped hand.

It was a magnificent specimen, not round, but a perfect oval; there was a tiny flaw or two, but the lustre was superb. And the size! Sixty grains it proved to weigh—the largest and finest pearl I have ever found in my many years of fishing.

My tender was not far off, feeling out the opened oyster. He was stirred up too.

"Big!" he said. "Big pearl. Me never see like that. You stop. No fish more now. Finish."

But I hardly heard him. I sat there for hours, holding this precious thing as if I were nursing a baby (that's what pearlers call them, "babies") and fairly seeing visions.

I knew it meant a sum that was a fortune to me; and my mind shot along all sorts of possibilities: going back to Sweden to show them I was somebody; becoming very rich, if I could find such treasures as that, and then doing just whatever I felt like; many boyish projects. But chiefly it was the sheer wonder of the pearl itself that fairly hypnotized me. Those exquisite gems are at their finest when they first come out of the ocean depths; and the colour, the translucence, the sensitive living delicacy of it cast a sort of spell over a man.

I put it into a tobacco sack—the best jewel bag I had—and fastened it around my waist, next to the skin, with a belt made of a pajama cord. Every once in a while I'd have to pull it out and look at it again to be sure it was as great a marvel as I remembered. Always it was.

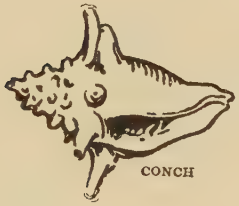
My tender was right: it was time to turn back. The weather was getting impossible here. Besides, anything else was an anticlimax until I did something about this prodigious find.

We started back, laying our course northwest to work around north of the Arus. The fine weather was past. We had to struggle along against alternate calms and shifting head winds.

When we were off Kola, we ran into a strong half hurricane. I had to make for shelter, so I put in behind a little island a few miles north of Dobbo.

That's how I found Ro. Blind chance again.

I'm not sure but that was a greater piece of luck than finding even my Biggest Pearl.



SUN FISH

CHAPTER X

I ACQUIRE THREE FRIENDS AND A LUGGER

THOSE Aru Islands are rather a queer place: shallow waters all about and most of the way to New Guinea, with lots of growing coral; islands separated only by twisting creeks like rivers; savage natives, resembling the Papuans; some houses built on piles sunk into solid rock, and consisting of two rooms, one surrounding the other. There is also the usual story of a white tribe 'way in the interior—which nobody has seen but everybody believes in.

Dobbo, on a small island on the west coast, is a

sort of trading resort for pearl fishers, especially when the nor'west monsoon shuts off work. There are all sorts of races clustered here then, bringing *bêche-de-mer* (sea slugs, or *tripang* in China), pearl shell, tortoise-shell, all the products they have gathered from the sea; and the traders flock in from every quarter to buy.

We had run to cover a few miles above the settlement. As the lugger forged ahead into quiet water I was standing on deck, looking about for a good anchoring place.

All at once I saw a canoe ahead. The man paddling her was quite different from the run of natives about there—much lighter brown, nicer-looking hair, cleaner. There was something strong and skilful in his use of the paddle, too, which made your glance settle on him a second time. He turned about presently and watched us coming in.

I sailed close past him, wondering what race he belonged to and what he was doing among these fuzzyheads. He seemed excited and sang out something I couldn't catch as we went by; then he dug his paddle in and chased after us. By the time I swung the lugger up into the wind he was alongside.

Making his canoe fast, he was up and over the rail like an eel. I liked him at first glance. His appearance was that of a sunburned white man—golden brown, straight black hair, big expressive eyes. He was like a young athlete, beautifully built, smooth limbs, no hair on his face or anywhere, chock full of life and energy and good nature, as he stood there, smiling.

"Where you from?" I asked him.

"From Paumotus, below Tahiti." His voice was musical, like a singer's.

"Tahiti—where's that?"

"You got chart? I show you."

I went below and dug out the chart. Here it was, sure enough, nearly six thousand miles off southeasterly in a straight line, past ten thousand islands. I could understand then that he might well be different from the others.

We kept on talking. He could speak English and French and pidgin and a little Malay, besides his own language, and he was quick as a flash about understanding things. He had been on schooners all over the South Seas and had lately worked as a diver on a Thusday Island boat. Leaving her at Dobbo, he'd found himself stranded there, so he'd picked up a canoe and started to look for shells with the natives. He was an expert skin diver and had been in the business most of his life but had never found a big pearl. I liked him better every minute we talked.

When he heard I was just back from the New Guinea coast he became tremendously interested.

"For heaven's sake," he broke out, "turn around! Get back there. I find bed big oysters this last trip. Big bed. Take me on, Cap'n. We fish it. Now!"

My mind had been all set to get back to Banda and see about disposing of my big pearl; but there was something about this fine, handsome, quick young chap that I simply couldn't resist. I told myself I really needed another diver—the constant work un-

der water was too much for any man; besides, I might get sick, when everything would come to a stop.

The truth was, I expect, that I was barely nineteen and was lonely. For a long time I'd been all by myself, no friend to talk to or do things with. Every youngster craves that.

I looked him over. He was the finest specimen of young manhood I'd ever beheld. He caught the idea that I was deciding. His white teeth showed in one of his flashing smiles.

"Get your things and come aboard," I told him. "We'll decide about New Guinea. We go together somewhere, anyhow."

That was another of my lucky days.

Well, I decided in a day or two to have a short try at this shell bed of his, in spite of the season. So we started east again. And during that next week Ro and I became friends for life. Such a combination of good-nature and strength and quickness and aliveness and varied experience I'd never imagined in a fellow of about my own age.

We told each other everything. He'd been born in Rapa, far down in the lower Paumotus, in the Tubuai group. His mother was a Tahitian woman —there seemed a similarity between our cases when he said that she had died when he was so little he couldn't remember her. His bringing up, though, was different enough from mine: he lived in many villages, he declared, and had many mothers; for it appeared that those Polynesian women, all of them, are so fond of children that if a mother dies some

other woman will adopt her baby, nurse it, care for it, without any fuss, just as a matter of course. Remembering my own bitterness at finding myself unwanted, thrown among strangers only interested in what they could get out of me—that seemed truly extraordinary.

Then he began to tell me stories of the Areoi. I've learned since that was a marvellous secret society in those islands, supposed to have been started by a pair of the lesser gods, with seven grades of members, very distinguished, very powerful, requiring all sorts of initiations for the upper classes, who were reverenced by everybody long before the white man ever saw the islands. But the holy horror of the missionaries at what they called their "revolting" practices had no relation whatever to Ro's pictures.

They were picked people, these Areois, the handsomest, bravest, finest, most accomplished there were, whether they came from chiefs' families or ordinary ones. They would travel from island to island, a hundred great canoes strong, with the sacred shrines on one or two of them, carrying a whole troupe of dancers, singers, actors, wrestlers. There wasn't much about raiding or fighting or sacrificing in Ro's stories. It was usually a triumphal progress, with everybody making them welcome, and the local chiefs staging a feast that lasted for days, to do them honour. The strictest rules within the order, some of them hard to understand, but mostly a life of freedom and singing and dancing and natural enjoyment.

Ro's big dark eyes would blaze as he told about them. "I like live in that time," he would say.

I agreed with him. And while there was much less sword-play and fewer burnings than in the sagas of the Vikings, I got much the same idea of the open adventure of it. I'd been thinking a lot of those old Northmen since I'd been in charge of the lugger; I rather fancied myself a little modern Viking, raiding pearl beds instead of seashore towns. Ro's feeling about it was so like my own that we grew close quickly.

He told tales of the present too. He described the girls of those islands, and he made them so attractive it seemed we must start for that part of the world right away. However, we had to make a stake first.

Ro piloted us to the bed he had discovered, went right down without a suit, and brought up shell. I had begun rather to fancy myself as a diver, but he could match me and add a few tricks of his own. He was a master, a fish in the water, a born seaman on deck, a grand companion all the time. He taught me a lot of little matters I wasn't sure about; and when he tended you, you simply left everything in his hands.

These were big oysters, as he had declared, tremendous. I brought up one that weighed an even twelve pounds. While we found no large pearls, we gathered so much shell, before we finished the bed, that we had to get rid of some by selling it to a passing trader.

We had become such trusted friends by this time,

that I finally took out my tobacco bag and showed Ro my big pearl. His eyes rounded.

"My God!" said he. "What a baby! Back in Tahiti you get lots of money for that. You buy two, three luggers for that pearl."

The southeast trades had started again. With favourable winds, we resolved to get back to Uncle. This time we worked around to south of the Arus.

We had put in there for water. Late that afternoon, as we lay in the cove, we saw a dinghy coming out to us. A rather swarthy white man was rowing it.

"Lugger ahoy!" he called, as he came close. "Can I come aboard?"

"Why not?" I answered.

He climbed up, and we looked each other over. He had an unusual face, rather a comical expression, and a nose quite unlike any man I knew, neither straight nor hooked. It struck your attention right away. I offered him a drink.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Don't know as I can tell you," he said solemnly.

"Why not?"

"I'm a dummy. Dumbest dummy you ever saw."

We broke out laughing. That's an Australian term. They won't give a Japanese a pearling license in that country, so the Jap works through a dummy: he finds some white man down on his luck and hires him to take out the license. Then the dummy lives on board and generally draws a little money for doing nothing. It's the last resort of a man who finds himself down and out there, stranded.

This fellow explained that his Jap employer had played a trick on him—carried him off here to the Arus, made him do all sorts of work. He told it all with a great sense of humour, but underneath he was very bitter against the Jap and disgusted with the ways of the master and the crew. He'd been a seaman for years.

Presently he looked squarely at me.

"Say," he said—and he was indeed earnest now, "for God's sake, let me go with you."

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Jack."

"You really want to come along?"

"Yes, I do. I can't stay in that bloody mess."

"All right," said I. "Anything you like."

He pounded the rail with his fist: "I like to stay."

"You mean now, right away?"

"Now. Let's go."

"But where's your kit?"

"To hell with that. The money too. I never want to see those yellow bastards again."

That tickled me. It was my own way of doing things. No fuss. Make up your mind—and do it.

We hailed a native and told him to pull the dinghy back to the Japanese boat. Then we put up sail and were off.

In those days I wanted life, I wanted good company around me. These two made the boat a different thing; we were larking and making fun and telling stories all day long. I realized just how much I'd been missing, working hard and coming up exhausted,

and then being all alone among these natives. This was something else.

Jack—we soon christened him Mexican Jack—told us all about himself. His father was an American, his mother Mexican with Indian blood. That was where he got that nose which puzzled me—an Indian nose. Since then I've seen the same type in the wife of a great friend in Havana.

He had lived as a boy in Mexico and Los Angeles and San Francisco; most of the time it was Mexico City, where he found himself on his own as a barefoot kid. His tough times reminded me of some of my own. He'd had similar experiences on sailing vessels too, only his were on American hell schooners. Just as bad, from his account. At last he couldn't stand it and cleared out, on a trip to the islands, winding up in this jam in Australia.

We three suited each other. There was never any question about our sticking together.

We sailed into the harbour at Banda and went ashore.

Uncle welcomed me as if I were his only son, back from a voyage. He got out all his delicacies, fussed over me, made my two friends feel as much at home as I did.

It was a proud moment when I showed him that load of shell, and, as a climax, handed over the money I'd received for the surplus we had sold. He couldn't contain his pleasure and approval.

"Plenty shell," he kept saying. "Plenty fine. You sabe good. Plenty good dive."

For a long time he'd been thinking about a trip back to China. You never get a real Chinaman's mind cut loose from his original home and his ancestors. Now he decided that this big batch of shell settled the matter. He'd go.

On top of everything else I showed him my Big Pearl. His eyes did shine at that! I really think the fine old chap was more delighted over my luck than over his own. It was funny, though, to notice how his patient, hard-working absorption in storing up enough money made him solemn as he examined the gem and figured in his mind what it ought to bring.

"Catchem big!" he almost whispered. "Big, big pearl. Plenty much money we sell. Plenty much. You rich boy. Must be careful. No lose. No steal. Plenty careful."

He wouldn't hear of looking for a buyer there or at Amboyna. "We go Macassar. Sell there," he announced.

That seemed sensible. Macassar is the centre of trade for all the eastern part of the archipelago; there are always a lot of Chinese and Arab pearl buyers there. So he hurried through his preparations, and we set out.

Once started, we took it easy, stopping at some of the little islands to see what we might pick up. Uncle was on his first holiday in many years: he'd sit on deck and watch us at work, perfectly delighted to see how things were going. Particularly did he approve of Ro. Everybody took to that handsome, smiling fellow; but he knew so many little things about

the natives, and he was so expert in the water or on deck that Uncle's shrewd gaze marked him out as a prize.

"Velly good partner you," he told me. "Sabe plenty. Divem, sailem, smile. Plenty good."

Long before we came to Macassar, on the long southwest peninsula of Celebes, Ko and Jack and I had worked out our general plan: we would make some sort of deal with Uncle for the lugger, and then we were off for Polynesia. Ko's yarns of the pearls and the girls made us crazy to see something different from the world of Malays and hairy Papuans and wild savages.

With one thing and another, then, we were all keyed up when we pulled into a cove near Macassar and went ashore. There's a Dutch town and port there—Vlaardingen, with the Governor's seat, and quite a big native settlement beyond. While there are three Chinese or Filipinos to every European, and the scrapings of every race and mixture in the world, this was the nearest thing to a civilized city we three had seen in many a month of weary work; the feel of that good glass gem in the sack next to my skin gave me the sensation of being Somebody. I expect I strutted a bit as we plunged into the usual salesman's galeries ashore.

The business part proved slow enough. Selling shell or seed pearls is almost as standard and as dealing in canned goods: there's a market, at a definite price, for any given place and season and quality

But pearls are so individual, perfect large specimens are so rare, and there are so many expert points to determine the value, that disposing of a prize "baby" is like negotiating a treaty of peace between two countries. Right away Uncle began to feel around for a buyer. One day he'd be sounding out a Chinese dealer, then an Arab, next a Filipino. My only part in these skirmishes would be to walk in when the moment came, display my treasure, stuff the bag back into my pocket — and, as soon as I was by myself, restore it to its belt under my shirt.

They were all crazy at the sight of it, these sharp traders; but even Uncle was put to it to work them up to anything like a fair price. As for me, I'd have been a babe in arms trying to deal with those land sharks. I listened while Uncle declared he was convinced the thing should bring $10,000 (£2,000), but the best offer he could get, at the end of weeks, playing off one buyer against the other, was £1,700 ($8,500). Either amount was a fortune to me. I left it all in his capable hands, knowing he'd take a little more trouble to get the top bid for me than if it had been for himself.

Meanwhile we were three husky youngsters, with money to spend, sitting on top of the world. We hit quite a pace. Naturally we had a small army of those "friends" who cluster around the bars like flies around sugar; but I'd had enough experience to understand that most of this motley gang wouldn't hesitate to put a knife into me with half a chance to lift my Big

Pearl. That never left its hiding place about my waist day or night, except at the moments mentioned; even when I was drunk I must have had some sense of guarding it.

A number of little incidents convinced me there was an organized gang who were out to get my prize, by theft, murder, or any other method. You could see it in some of those wicked, furtive eyes; you felt it in scraps of talk, slight happenings, that meant a lot when you had the key.

This came to a climax one night in an odd way.

I had become acquainted with a chap there—we called him "Shanghai Charlie." (That sounds rather like a roughneck; he was anything but that.) Our meeting was peculiar enough in itself. I was sitting at a table in one of the private bars—feeling pretty good, I fancy. I have a mind like a phonograph record about music: when I've once heard a song, for instance, that interests me, I'll apparently forget all about it for a while—then some day I'll find myself singing the air and the words, even when I don't understand the latter. It had been a long time since I'd remembered the Chinese song that Uncle taught me on the schooner, coming from Surabaya; but all of a sudden I started in on this singsong tune, unconsciously imitating his manner and the falsetto tone. I hadn't finished two lines of it when this nice-looking young Chinese, by himself at the next table, started up. "Where'd you learn that song?" he asked. I told him, and he sang it over with me. We liked each other and yarned a bit together. His father was a

banker in Shanghai, and Charlie had been a clerk in the bank, till he and the old man had had a row about something. He'd cut loose from home and drifted about, trying everything from hotel porter to sailor before the mast—China, Philippines, the islands. You can't have any idea of that type from an American Chinese laundryman or curio dealer. He's shy, keeps to his own people. But an educated Shanghai settlement Chinese businessman mixes in the clubs and is equal to a Westerner in everything. Charlie had knocked about, but he was serious and responsible at bottom, really a superior human being. I gathered his money was getting low and he was disgusted with Macassar—though he was much too sensitive to say anything that would sound like hunting for help. He knew that wide-open town like the palm of his hand, and he had more than once put us on to things.

Well, as I say, Macassar in those days was a tough joint, full of opium-smoking dives, and with a gang of murderous riffraff that would stop at nothing. So they framed up a sort of badger game on us, to get away with our clothes and grab that pearl.

They miscalculated several ways. The result was that Ro and I, in the barroom of one of these dives one night, heard Jack yelling for help upstairs, where a gang of these pimps had cornered him.

It didn't take many seconds for us to get up those stairs, break down the door, and get him out of that room. Then we rushed down again, and went through that crowded place like a pack of barracuda in among a school of fish. That was a fight! They were using

knives and we used fists: they're handiest, and you don't drop them. If we three hadn't been fast chums already we'd have been bound together by that gorgeous scrap.

By the time we reached the door the place was buzzing like a hornet's nest, women shrieking, "Fire!" and "Police!" and that bar looking as if a hurricane had struck it. Outside the whole street was stirred up. As we started to beat it we saw several Dutch cops coming on the run, and we began to have pictures of those awful jails. They're past a joke, those island lock-ups, and the authorities will let a foreigner rot there if they feel like it.

It looked bad. We didn't know how to get out of this maze of narrow twisting alleys in the darkness, and the bally cops were right behind, with Malays to guide them.

All of a sudden this Shanghai Charlie appeared from nowhere and grabbed me by the arm.

"Quick," was all he said. And then we were dodging sideways through some blind entrance and sneaking about through winding smelly passages—and in fifteen minutes we were at the waterside and paddling out to the lugger.

That experience didn't make me think any less of Charlie, I can tell you. The next day, as we sat around the cabin with the chart, going over our proposed cruise to the south, I caught a look on his face.

I glanced at Ro and Jack. They understood and both nodded.

"What're you going to do, Charlie?" I asked.

"Dunno. This damned town's no good to me," said he.

"Like to go along with us?"

"Go? Me? Just try me."

So our partnership of four was settled right there. No more definite arrangement than just that. It wasn't necessary. We trusted each other.

For some time, good steady old Uncle had been worried about our youthful hell-raising. "No good," he kept telling me. "Work better. Plenty bad this town." He was afraid I'd lose the pearl somehow, or turn up on my back with a knife in me. He'd been working his head off, trying to screw one of these buyers up to the two thousand pounds he thought the least the gem should bring. One evening he had us to dine with him at a little Chinese restaurant. He smiled at me and started in.

"Time you start," said he earnestly. "No wait. I fix now. Mebbe so this pearl bring much money later, but mebbe so cost more wait here."

That was cold fact, and I saw it.

"One friend here got money; I fix my business my friend. I go home. Mebbe I no come back. No can tell. Now I give you fo'teen hundred pounds, give you lugger, I take pearl home."

That was a good trade all round. He hadn't paid much for the lugger, even counting in the repairs. On the other hand, a new boat like her would have cost me perhaps eight hundred pounds—and I hadn't

seen anything in these waters to touch her. I could handle her; she was mine: I'd have swapped the whole bally pearl for her if necessary. Besides, the way I felt toward Uncle, anything he settled on was right with me.

We shook hands on it then and there. They drank to the new nineteen-year-old master pearler. No lawyers, no contracts, no signing anything. Just a handshake. That's the way I liked to do business—and the kind of man to do business with.

I tell you, it was a fine sensation to wake up next day and go on deck and look over that beautiful little boat—and say to myself: "Mine!"

Almost as good it was to look at those three and know they were my friends and we were about to set off together. We were most satisfyingly alike. While they seemed to consider me leader, nobody was boss; there wasn't a scrap of formal agreement. We'd just talk over some project, and presently one of us would say, "Let's go!" That was all there was to it. Life was rosy ahead to the south and east that day.

I showed Uncle on the chart where we were bound. He thought the boat was too small for such a cruise.

"Plenty wind. Plenty hullicane," he said, shaking his head. "Too far. No good."

"Plenty time," I told him. And in point of fact, that was the essential matter.

This was a small craft, to be sure, only twelve tons. She had a hold for the diving gear and shell, a fo'c'sle cubbyhole for the crew, and a cabin just about big enough for our four bunks. But those pearling lug-

gers are the staunchest things afloat; a man can cover the whole sweep of the Southern seas in one—if he knows how and *has time*.

Say from Borneo on, I wouldn't hesitate to start out to visit the entire island world in such a craft—or in a three-tonner, or even a whaleboat, for that matter. The trick is to steer clear of the hurricane belts. If you do have to sail in those belts, there's no trouble when you get the southeaster; it's only the nor'west monsoon that brings the hurricanes.

This true hurricane belt sweeps along the southern part of New Guinea, beginning with the nor'west season, and swings off between the New Hebrides and the Solomons. The coconut groves in the Solomons have never been ruined by a hurricane. Then it hits the New Hebrides and Loyalties and New Caledonia and the Fijis, and seems to wind up there.

By swinging up north of this big track, and not worrying about the calms, you can take the nor'wester and go along. That means, of course, not being in a hurry. You've got to take time, fit into the weather conditions you find. A man who must get somewhere by a given date and tries to drive his boat through —well, there are bound to be times when I'd not envy him, no matter what sort of vessel he had under his feet.

That was all right with us: we had all the time there was.

We were to set out with just our own four aboard, picking up a crew when we wanted them. This avoided expense and the trouble of sending natives

back to their own islands. More than that, we four were independent; we could handle the boat and the gear and everything; we were good company for each other: it was splendid to start out on this big cruise with nobody in the way, just our little company of fellow adventurers.

I shall never forget parting with Uncle.

He was bound for his Shanghai home. Apparently all the Chinamen who settle down in Australia or America come from the suburbs of Canton. A Shanghai Chinaman will travel, but he doesn't want to settle; they've been through those islands to the south of them for hundreds of years, long before the white man ever discovered those regions, but always keeping in touch with Shanghai and the family.

I knew I really owed all my exciting future, everything, to this friendly, sympathetic, steady, fair-minded yellow trader. We had a little party when his affairs and ours were all in order, and as I looked at him I realized how a son must feel toward a father who'd looked out for him, helped him, started him in life—I don't hesitate to say it—loved him.

I cannot recall any emotion up to that time quite so deep and searching as the extraordinary swelling in my heart when the lugger took the breeze and glided out, and I saw Uncle standing there in a little proa to see us off, quietly watching. He raised his arm once. That was all. I knew he was feeling just as I was.

If he is in the land of the living, I hope he is happy in his Shanghai home, with plenty of sons to burn joss

sticks to him as an ancestor some day, and all the bird's-nest soup and *bêche-de-mer* and turtle eggs he can eat, and a group of cronies with whom to play fan-tan or mah jong or whatever he best likes.

He was a true friend.

TRIGGER FISH

CHAPTER XI

THE TERROR OF THE DEEP

WE WERE off, on the Golden Adventure of a life which has had no lack of varied and unusual happenings.

We were Four Musketeers of the Sea, all for each and each for all; young, already devoted to each other, free, with plenty of money and plenty of time and no rules except those we made ourselves; with a trade that is a daily adventure; with a staunch little vessel under our feet for home; sailing away into the stretching wonder of the island world. Something new and memorable every day. The lure of the huge, perfect

pearl, waiting for us in some weed-encrusted oyster at the bottom of the sea, which is like the Argonaut tales of the Golden Fleece to every pearler—and taking this perpetual gamble in the holiday mood of four youngsters, doing together just what they want to do.

That's a lot pleasanter calling than

> To be young, handsome, twenty-two,
> With nothing in the world to do
> But sit all day and bill and coo.

Those island maids Ro told of were in our minds, to be sure; but they were a decoration to the life, not the main object.

No wonder we called ourselves the Pearl Vikings and made up songs of oared galleys and raids to southward—though we contemplated no forceful raid except upon the unfortunate flaccid pearl oyster. No wonder we were utterly care free and happy. We were a gay party as the little lugger slipped along to eastward.

While I had no notion of it, I had some stern and needed education coming to me. I was quite at home now in undersea work; I'd never had any serious accident or misadventure in this first year or more, though I had learned most things by actual experience with no guide; and I assumed unconsciously that I knew it all. I considered myself now a master pearler of the world.

Of course, one heard plenty of stories. I don't mean such ridiculous absurdities as the "first-hand" account of Skipper James Floyd of the *Pearl* (pub-

lished as fact in Indian newspapers of 1874 and since reprinted in popular works) of how an octopus with a body "like the back of a huge whale" came aboard his 150-ton schooner, capsized her, and pulled her down, with two of the crew! What I'm referring to is the statements made by captains who at least know what another seaman, or diver, might swallow.

A master pearler of the world's fishing grounds is in quite different case from one who works a given locality. A man who spends his working life in fishing one group or region becomes familiar with the growth, the fish, the dangerous creatures of those special waters; he may know nothing whatever about what another man might find who's dived in many waters in widely separated corners of the globe.

It seems to me that is a main reason why there has been so much fiction masquerading as fact about the undersea monsters. That, and a certain tendency of marine biologists to assume that under-water life is the same in all the Southern seas as in those places where they have established stations for marine studies; or that they can make statements about the giant octopus because they have charted the anatomy and habits and strength of the insignificant creatures common in the Mediterranean or West Indies, or even the fossil octopods of Lebanon rocks; or because they have the results of oceanographic sweepings. I have made inquiries of a courteous museum expert in this branch of marine biology: it didn't trouble him in the least that he couldn't give me any reference whatever to scientific studies of cephalopods, or marine life in

general, from any part of an island-studded ocean much larger than the continent of North America. No: "an octopus" could do so-and-so. I'm not stingy: I'd gladly give that nice gentleman and excellent naturalist a few moments of one particular experience of my own.

For, after all, what does our knowledge of deep-sea life amount to compared with the area to be explored—a total more than twice as large as the earth's land area—and the difficulties: peaks and mountain ranges and chasms and clefts and caverns beyond anything the land has to show? Just imagine yourself in an airship sailing over the Alps or the Alleghany Mountains for instance, unable to see down more than a hundred feet or so, exploring the life of that region by dredges or nets or traps or cylinders or sounding leads: how long might you be at it without obtaining any evidence, for example, of raccoons, which den up during the day in hollow trees or caves in the ledges? And the octopus is normally a cave-dweller.

Perhaps I shouldn't say it. But I know enough from observation to know how much there may be about which I know nothing. And I know enough to be highly skeptical of some of the positive "Noes" that science has uttered from the laboratory.

When pearlers get together each man naturally tries to make the most of his own experiences; they are fairly sure, after the bottle's been passed once or twice, to begin out-talking each other; some writer overhears these yarns and adds his own literary

touches. Often the man who first related the tale wouldn't recognize it when it's printed.

Owing to this urge of mine to see new places and new people and new pearling beds, I have happened, during twenty years, to wander over a vast expanse: from Borneo to Easter Island, from the Marshalls to the lower Paumotus, probably covers twice as much space on the map as the whole of Africa. I've been down in countless places, drifted for miles and miles along the bottom behind my lugger. I feel I have some judgment to bring to bear on the truth of the tales related. I have been told by natives in the eastern Fijis of a big canoe full of men drawn under by an octopus, and of a Jap diver who went down near that spot in a suit—and never came up. I happen to believe that. But it has seemed to me more sensible to speak only of what I have seen with my own eyes—limited as must be the experiences of any one man, however afflicted with wandering feet.

Among all the strange undersea creatures which have interested me the octopus holds first place.

Speaking as a diver—not as a seaman, or a whaler, or anything else—this is the most formidable monster of our working world. He is, without sensationalism, the Terror of the Deep. I almost despair of giving a reader any adequate idea of the extraordinary creature. Still, here's the result of some years of acquaintance.

First of all, it has eight arm-feet, coming off from around a hideous mouth, very long in proportion to its body size, and these eight arms are just like eight

boa constrictors all going at the same time, for their swift, flexible movements are precisely those of an active snake. When he stands up to the height of a man and oozes or darts forward, backward, sideways, any way, these eight sinuous arms are all going at the same time; when he climbs swiftly up over a cliff like a spider, or creeps under an overhanging reef, every part of these eight arms is continually doing something. He is horribly, squirmingly, frighteningly alive. And then suddenly he'll stop—and be as horribly dead, turn to any colour to match his background, no matter what, mimic the shapes about him, lying in wait for prey. Under water one becomes accustomed to all sorts of startling colour changes, as I've said, but there's no animal in all the world who can equal the octopus in imitating anything. The fishes are amateurs beside him: he'll imitate pink, red, purple, blue coral—I've seen him break out with dark stripes. As you study him, you feel the Creator has given him everything.

This "head-foot" mollusk (cephalopod) has along the inside of each of his eight arms a double row of protruding suckers which, when it clamps them firmly against anything, form a vacuum and cling like a monstrous leech; and where these radiating lines of suckers meet, around his voracious belly mouth, there is a perfect mesh of similar gripping suction disks. Any prey forced by these loathsome muscular, grasping arms into that pit of adhesiveness is held fast in the very jaws of destruction. For here gapes a great fleshy mouth, and, just within the opening,

a big, hooked beak like an overgrown parrot or toucan. This horny weapon can cut or tear to pieces any soft flesh that reaches this torture chamber; it can rip open the shells of the crabs which seem to be a customary food.

There is a tremendous force back of all this terrible mechanism: the octopus seems to gulp down whole living creatures, or big gobbets ripped out, and somehow get rid of the bones. The size of the mouthfuls he will take in is quite incredible unless one has actually watched him feeding. Likewise the awful swiftness with which he digests it—like some devouring mechanism with fiery acids in its maw which instantly dissolve the ingredients poured into it.

Then his eyes! Fishes' eyes are usually dull, but I believe the octopus does most of its hunting at night. Anyhow, its eyes are quite different in expression from those of any sea creature I know. If any great painter should wish to picture the Devil—even if he specialized on that subject, like those morbid old mediæval artists—let him come down undersea with me and get the vision I have had: he will become famous for portraying the most sinister, terrible eyes that human imagination has ever depicted. They are not round but oval, slanting; not dark or large, but small, intent with that completely terrifying expression of cold malignity toward all other life. The rhinoceros has something of the same look, but he's generally in a childish temper; devilish is the only expression for this beast's alert, steady, evil glance.

The strength of these arms is almost unnatural. I

believe some scientific investigators in the West Indies or Bermuda have tested the holding power of the baby specimens taken there, and my museum acquaintance quoted their report as showing that a

OCTOPUS MAN

man's strength could easily pull those suckers loose. That's like frolicking with a newborn lion cub and announcing that a full-grown lion is a nice safe playmate. I am speaking of what we call the giant octopus of Eastern and Southern seas—I haven't been able to learn from scientists whether it is a different species, or simply an extra large variety. As I shall explain, I have captured good-sized octopi alive and watched them for hours in a pool from which they couldn't

escape. And I shall relate another even more pertinent experience. In my judgment a big serpent of the same size has nothing like the sheer muscular strength of these arms: the octopus has eight working in partnership, with no brittle backbone like the snake which can be paralyzed with one sharp blow; and it also has the aid of these powerful, gripping suction disks.

Watch one of these octopi standing up on these long, snaky arms, creeping sideways, shooting here and there, fixing his prey with that slant eye, oozing behind a boulder to lie in wait—I'd like to see the man heroic enough to go down and challenge him to a fight! There is no shark, no matter what its size and voracity, that is so repulsive and fearful to every human instinct.

We haven't begun as yet to list his queernesses. As I say, the Creator gave him everything in the way of equipment.

He has a funnel-shaped cavity in his body, opening by a tube below his mouth, with a pair of gill plumes by which he breathes, but having a return valve much like that on a diving helmet; this valve he can close at will. (The biologists declare it a rudimentary hind foot.) This funnel, six inches to a foot long, is the siphon (or mid-foot). He takes in water through the tube, extracts oxygen, and squirts out the liquid from his siphon: you can follow his slow breathing by these jets like the discharge of an automatic pump.

But the most spectacular function of this siphon is its use to shoot the mollusk swiftly to a distance. For

this formidable creature has three distinct methods of locomotion. He can crawl nimbly like a huge spider, on the bottom or over rocks, with these eight flexible arms moving like walking snakes. He can paddle or swim through the water with a kind of rowing motion. But above all, when he is attacking, he can hurl himself to a distance by air-and-water pressure through this siphon. With a powerful, swift effort he can expel the water and air through this funnel and shoot himself backward like a rocket, fifty to a hundred feet, almost faster than the eye can follow him. It seems to be a trick he uses for attack, and it is a tiger's spring—the fastest movement I have seen in the water world. His long arms trail back close to his body; he steers both with them and the siphon, I fancy; and the instant he reaches his mark those snaky arms whip around it, the scores of suckers fasten tight, he drags it down. If it is very large or active he must get hold of an anchoring place with a couple of arms.

Nobody who hasn't seen it could credit the catlike swiftness and savagery of these long-distance assaults.

In addition to all this, masking his movements and for defence, he possesses an ink sac. When he wants to cover up his retreat and prepare for another attack, he can squirt out a cloud of this blue-black liquid, laying his own smoke screen for yards about, while he darts in among the rocks and creeps out for an assault from an unexpected point. He has the cunning of a fox. This ejection is odourless down below, and after some emptyings of the sac the animal must have

time to renew it; I have prodded a captive with a bamboo pole: he kept squirting ink for several minutes, then the supply of colouring matter ran dry; but the amount of protective discolouration a large octopus can produce in the water is extraordinary.

It has no proper heart, but a ventricle outside the cœlum cavity, on each side of which is an extension of a vein serving as an auricle. When an arm is cut off, one sees no blood—just a little bluish ooze. And one of these arms of a male is modified at breeding time and is used to fertilize the eggs in the female.

The sacklike body is most elastic, capable of changing shape like a rubber bag; the creature can twist and stretch this fleshy ball till it is like a snake, and it will crawl into holes and crevices which look impossible to its size when normally rounded.

I've read the scientists' theory that the first beasts crawled from under the seas up on the land. This thing must have crawled the other way. Personally, I'm convinced that the chief reason we know so little about him is that his true home is in depths of a hundred fathoms or more. We know just nothing from actual observation of six-hundred-foot depths undersea. He lives down there, this giant octopus, and the only time he comes even to the shallows is during the breeding season. (The adult, that is. The baby octopi swarm in the shallow water at times, even on the beach. They are a standard article of food.)

They are always in pairs when man comes in contact with them; and the time a pearl diver has to be on guard is in this breeding period.

The female, larger than the male, finds a quiet place, some deep crevice or lonely cavern—for this creature is essentially a cave-dweller; and, cunning fox as he is, one might haul drags past his retreat year in and year out without ever bringing up evidence of his presence. In this safe solitude the female lays long strings of eggs, like ropes with knots hanging there in the cavern. It continually siphons these eggs, some of which are the size of a man's thumb, and both parents hang about until they hatch out, the whole process taking apparently a couple of months.

The young octopi go straight to the surface, play around the rocks, lie along the beach; they seem to enjoy sunning themselves. When they are three or four months old they begin to go down. As they reach full size I am sure they are living in the deeps—though, of course, not below the stratum where there is abundant sea life, for, like sharks, they prefer live food.

I have attempted to set down some of the more striking facts as I have been able to observe and learn them; but no description could do justice to the living, prowling, lurking, attacking creature.

I always think of him as the most extraordinary actor in the animal world (or any other world). He can mimic anything. Changing his colour through the whole range, he can also push out lumps and knobs on top of his head, on the backs of his arms, to resemble the roughnesses of the coral rock. "Making up" before your eyes, he is one thing now and a completely different thing a moment later. In school I

read the Greek myth of Proteus, the old man of the sea, who changed from shape to shape in the hands of anyone who caught hold of him—leopard, snake, bush, fire: it no longer seems impossible when you've watched this mimicking thug of the deeps. You stand there, not believing your own eyes. Then he lurks like a crafty spider; camouflaging himself into invisibility; instead of a web, holding ready these swift, snaky, suckered arms; waiting for his prey to come within range. When a fish touches one of these deadly living strands of the web it often seems stunned as if by an electric shock. Not a kick out of it. One touch and it is food.

I have often wondered why these incredible creatures should have their home down in these deep, dark waters; it must be an entirely different life there; one cannot imagine such a place—the picture of hell cannot begin to equal it: these creeping, darting, vicious monsters dodging about, fighting for supremacy a hundred fathoms below the surface. Who knows what else may live in that fearsome world, never coming up in contact with human activities except possibly, like the octopus, to reproduce and give its young a start before they can stand such pressure?

It seems to me some of the confusion about him is like two people quarrelling over what they know about "cats": one is discussing the house cat, or even the wild cat; the other has had experience with the big cats, say, an African lion. There are many species of octopus. I am talking about the lion of the family, the giant who rises periodically from his deep home

caverns to give birth to a new generation. That is my octopus.

While there is almost no danger from them except in the neighbourhood of submarine caves, it happens, unfortunately, that shell often grows around just such formations, on the shelves, or on overhanging ledges. Hence the chance for an unpleasant or fatal encounter at these times.

I had listened to plenty of awed tales, by natives and white men, of this monster of the water underworld.

At nineteen, with my own experience, day after day, on many beds, my answer had always been, "Rubbish!"

Then I got my first lesson in this particular sea mystery.

We were coming down from northeast Borneo to Macassar Strait. That is in my opinion the meanest, ugliest, most godforsaken coast in all the world, a succession of dirty rivers and swamps and reefs and real "wild men of Borneo" and fevers. A ghastly country. Even the ocean is discoloured far out from these mucky rivers pouring in—none of that crystal clearness of the South Seas or even the Moluccas. We were just above the Equator, perhaps forty miles north of Cape Mangka-Tihat, when we sighted a couple of little islands. Ro found out from one of the crew that the nearest one was called Bilangbilangan, that it was uninhabited, and that there were turtles there. So we put in to get turtle—for that means eggs

and fresh meat and tortoise-shell to a rover of Eastern seas.

This island is at the tip of a huge shoal stretching twenty miles from shore, and there's a narrow deep passage between it and Muaras Reef. You can sail for miles over twenty or thirty feet of water, and then suddenly the bottom pitches down to five hundred or a thousand feet.

As is customary with every pearler, I was watching the sea floor while we moved easily over these shallows toward land. I noticed a number of patches here and there: they began to interest me.

"Gee!" said I, "it looks like shell here."

It looked good—these shell, the current, all the signs a diver learns which are so hard to describe. Ro went down after a while, and I tendered him.

Presently he came up with a piece of small shell which we always go by a lot.

"By God!" he said. "I no find. But it look like shell all right."

We grew excited: finding a new and virgin bed is an adventure that never fails to get a pearler keyed up.

"I'll go down and have another look-see," I told him.

Getting into the suit, I started to explore thoroughly, gliding up and down over these patches, drifting along behind the lugger, straining my eyes for the first glimpse of the big pearl oysters which had come to be my special game in my submarine hunting.

The water was fairly deep, about twenty fathoms.

To one side of me there was, not exactly a hole, but an open space between masses of coral: I fancied I could distinguish something lying down there suspiciously like real shell. So I worked my way over these boulders down into this flat well.

The object which had drawn me there seemed more than ever what I was seeking so keenly. I stooped down to pick it up. And at that instant I felt something touch me quite lightly on the left arm.

Instinct and under-water training saved my life. Quick as a flash, before I had the least notion of what it was, I whirled about, grabbing the razor-sharp knife from my belt sheath, and slashed three or four times with a full sweep of my arm in the direction of this touch. By luck I severed two of the lassooing arms that were gripping me; in another instant the octopus would have had my two arms pinioned and I should have been helpless.

As I slashed and felt the blade cut through a mass of soft flesh, two more arms laid hold of me, one around each ankle. I felt a vicious jerk at my legs which almost upset me.

It all sounds melodramatic when one recounts it in protected civilization. Yet no description in words could paint the horror of that moment. It was rather murky in this place, but I could see a sort of shapeless mass and wavering, squirmy arms—even one severed stump—ahead there by the rocks; and I knew only too well now that this was the Thing which had produced those fearsome native tales I had pooh-poohed. I had a swift picture of my com-

panions above pulling up severed, dangling life-line and air-hose; of a human being, that was myself, gripped close to the maw of this loathsome monster.

Meanwhile I was fighting automatically. Each time I would bend to try to cut my ankles free, the creature would jerk me so violently that I seemed to be a little boy pulled about at will by a strong man; it was with the greatest difficulty that I kept my footing. The helmet and breastplate banged against my head and chest with punishing force. One jerk dashed me against a rock and left me breathless. The force of the beast was terrific and produced a deathly sense of fear. Also, the cold intelligence with which he appeared to anticipate my actions, and checkmate my every attempt, had a deep effect on nervous resistance.

It was life or death. My body and mind were working as if they had no relation to each other: one was straining, struggling, fighting against these shattering tugs, trying to cut, to stab, to free myself; the other, somewhere, was carefully weighing chances, considering the elements of the situation, attempting to decide whether I dared give the danger signal.

That's the last thing a diver resorts to in an emergency—four pulls, meaning, "Pull until the line breaks." The emergency was there all right; but the trouble was that I feared my air-pipe and life-line might have become tangled in some of these coral projections all about: should they be fouled, such a strain from above might easily cut them off or leave me hopelessly jammed into some crevice. A man work

ing under water always has those two lines of communication in his subconscious mind; it becomes automatic never to take action without making sure neither has been fouled. And little chance I had in this fix to check up on that!

All this time our strange duel was continuing. I was using all my strength to resist the creature's pulls, while striving to cut more of these living fetters which bound me. (There seemed to be a mass of them, twice as many as in reality, coiled, all about.)

To add to my difficulties I found my weights, where I was getting hit, were swinging the wrong way: I had to keep my helmet above my body—otherwise the air there gets into the body and legs of the suit and a man is finished. The outlet valve had to be manipulated, and through all this struggle I must remain erect, righting myself after every jerk at my ankles.

And it was as if that devilish brain in that voracious pulpy creature understood all this perfectly: the instant my hand would stretch down with the big knife he'd give a terrific jerk, sometimes dragging me ten or fifteen feet, jamming the heavy helmet against my jaws and skull, bruising me against the rough, crusted rock wall. All this in a pool now blackened and turbid with the ink the beast had squirted out.

Occasionally I'd get help in righting myself from a strain on the life-line and air-line; and after a while a slight current seemed to set through and carry off some of the thickest discolouration.

When I got a glimpse of that disgusting mass of

arms and squirming legs, and especially one look into those diabolical eyes, I stretched up to give the danger signal. Instantly the octopus yanked me a dozen feet, and I had all I could manage just not to topple over.

The thought flashed through my mind: "This is exactly like Hell." For it was all this foul, unnatural, dirty black, and this unbelievable thing had me in its grip, bent on devouring me.

Apparently what I have been telling must have occupied ten to fifteen minutes. At the time it was an eternity to me—there was nothing before or after this nightmare struggle. I began to realize I could not last much longer. The first severe knock with the helmet had cut and bruised and dizzied me; the subsequent rough handling and battering against the coral had worn down my strength, till I perceived I was lost unless something were done quickly. It no longer seemed a desperate measure to take a chance on my air-hose's being clear.

All at once I knew I was going. Just before the wave of fear-freighted unconsciousness swept over me I threw up my arms, caught both lines, gave four frantic pulls. There was an instant when I had the sensation of being pulled in two lengthways. Then I knew nothing.

Up above, Ro had been tending me from the lugger's deck. He could see nothing down there, but his experience and water sense told him something was wrong. All during that eventful quarter of an hour

he had been waiting, taut, fearing to destroy me if he acted before receiving some signal, yet certain I was in trouble.

Then my four jerks spelled out extreme peril.

Ro pulled. Nothing budged. He shouted to a man at the pumps. This fellow ran across the heaving deck —there was quite a swell on the surface—and lay to behind him. Still no give. In a frenzy he brought a third man. He was in a quandary now: the life-line is a light affair and would hardly stand three good men's full effort, particularly if caught in the rocks.

The situation seemed desperate: they put forth all their strength. They could not stir whatever was holding me down below.

It was then that Ro's quick thinking saved me from a horrible death. The boat was rising and falling on this swell, which had been getting heavier. He leaped back, took several turns around a stout stanchion, ordered the two men to strain up till my life-line and air-hose were taut and rigid just as the lugger was at the bottom of one of these surges. The ocean swell picked her up, and the full force of the lift came on my two tight lines.

I fancy my captor must have been caught momentarily off balance, or perhaps while shifting those two anchoring arms, by which he had been fastened to a solid support and enabled to shake me as a terrier shakes a rat.

Anyhow, I shot suddenly up to within ten or fifteen feet of the surface.

I do not know why, but it was at this moment I regained consciousness with a jerk.

I knew I must be near the top, from the light above. I woke to that same dream of being pulled in two: looking down, I could see the sea-demon's suckered arms were still fast about my ankles; the loathsome mass of his body was suspended below. It was not a pleasant wakening.

There was nothing I could do. Impossible to stretch down and free my legs with that pull on them and the lines pulling up. The octopus was pulling with all its force, siphoning violently. Fortunately I did not have to do anything.

The instant I was close enough to see what was the matter, Ro yelled at the men to pull hard. Deftly he got a stouter line about my body. Two more men caught this and hauled me upward.

Ro slipped into the water, his big knife ready. In two sure slashes he had cut off those horrible arms.

The two men hauled me to the surface, more dead than alive, with the pieces of suckered feelers still coiled about my legs.

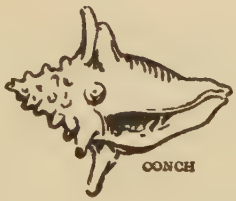
They got me on deck and took off the helmet. I looked, and felt, as if I had been through the worst fight of my life—blood all over my face and neck and shoulders, hands and arms and legs torn from the action of the suckers, bruised from head to foot by the bangings about. I was pretty well all in. My eyes closed. They thought for a moment I was dying.

Someone ran for a glass of brandy and poured it

down my throat. The fiery stuff brought me somewhat to my senses. I opened my eyes and looked about.

There they were, my three chums, standing about in the bright sunlight, with anxious faces. But they and the familiar lugger and all those things I knew so intimately looked quite strange. It must be that if a dead man could come back to life he would feel as I did then.

First I laughed, and then I cried. Hysterical, just like a nervous woman. What with their fright and the sight of that beast, my companions were in bad shape themselves. They needed a drink and then another. We did not do much work for the next three days.



CHAPTER XII

TAKING OCTOPUS ALIVE

DURING this period there was but one subject of conversation on board the lugger: How long were the arms of this octopus which had attacked me?

That is inevitably a matter of prime interest—extremely difficult to decide when the only testimony is that of men under great excitement. Moreover, there seem to be no reliable records as to the size of the giant octopus, though there is a statement that one museum has a severed arm of a giant squid from Newfoundland waters thirty-five feet long. (In the yarns there's no limit to the length.)

All on board had seen the beast; Ro had been right beside it; and I had been much too close for more than ten waking minutes. We finally agreed that the length of each arm must have been eighteen feet; the body not quite the size of a flour barrel. If one can imagine doing such a thing, a man could probably stretch his arms about it with fingers meeting.

We were quite agreed on one point: that I would never be nearer death and come back to tell of it. Only my instinctive reaction and those first slashes with my shark knife had saved me; for if the creature had had all of his lassooing feelers and their full strength, he could easily have held me helpless, dragged me into his deep hole—and then one snap of air-hose and life-line would have ended the matter, save for his meal.

Naturally enough, the adventure made a deep impression on me. I was no more ready than before to believe some of the tall tales of frightened divers, but I found myself so interested in this remarkable mollusk that for years I experimented with all the species I could find, studying their structure and habits.

People seem to confuse several quite different beasts in this group, speaking of octopi and cuttlefish as the same thing. To a deepsea worker there is no resemblance. There is the best-known cuttlefish, the sepia, which furnishes the brown pigment of that name from its dried ink sac; it has a concealed chalky shell, valuable for polishing, for moulding fine metal castings; you may have had some in your mouth,

since it goes also into tooth powders. Then there is the giant squid (*Architeuthis*), a ten-armed monster with a habit of rearing itself out of the water and squirting a jet: science somewhat rashly pronounces this the largest of the cephalopods, "with an extreme size about sixty feet," and plausibly explains it as the source of many sea-serpent narratives, particularly that of the Greenland missionary, Hans Egede. And finally, there is my special friend the big octopus.

Seen at rest, or dead, it might seem almost defenseless, for the skin on the back and arms is like a soft glove. A sharp knife will go through it like cheese. Yet it is incredibly hard to kill: Doubtless if one stabbed into that elusive heart, it would settle the matter; there is one vulnerable spot, in the back of what should be his neck. I've never been sure I found his heart, though. You can cut one in half, and the two pieces will apparently continue fighting. I used to think that if an arm were lopped off it would grow right out again; I've begun to doubt this, from the frequency with which you find them with one or more arms missing. The beast has a way of creeping quietly along, and, when he sees a gaping oyster, of gripping the shells and ripping the bivalve open. Occasionally he'll get a feeler into a giant clam instead; those bally things are sometimes three feet across—and when they shut down with a snap they crush the arm right off.

The big octopi do not ever seem to be washed up ashore by storms. Perhaps those suction disks hold on even beyond grim death. The activity and fierce-

ness when alarmed is simply awe-inspiring: the creature wears itself out, like a raging wild beast, tears at the coral, tears itself to pieces. I've seen them eat their own arms, as if they didn't know what they were doing and were insensible to pain.

My absorption in the creature led me to devote a lot of time to it. After my failure I worked out a method of capturing good-sized specimens alive.

By this plan I've taken them up to approximately a ten-foot spread—five-foot arms; and I believe I can handle one twice that size with a proper crew. The beast loses most of his power when you once get him into the air. Of course, there'd be lively doings before we got that far.

I am convinced these captives were of the same species as the one that attacked me, only not full grown; also that as they grow older and larger they increase prodigiously in strength and wariness, and rarely leave their gloomy caverns. On the other hand, the sheer length of arms does not always tell the story: a ten-footer may be as powerful as a much longer one —just as is the case with snakes. My impression is that the young octopus does not go back to its parents' deeps for some time, but crawls about the reefs, and gradually works deeper and deeper as he grows in size; and it is these partly grown ones which a man has a chance of trapping. However, a specimen with a ten-foot spread is strong enough, when once anchored, to hold two or three men down; so he furnishes plenty of excitement and interest.

The natives have traps for the little fellows that

they use as food, but these were no good to me. After several years, and an immense expenditure of time and energy, I succeeded in building a trap for the bigger ones, which I used in the southern Fijis and a number of other places.

I take big, strong bamboos and build a stout cage, four or five feet in diameter, the bars a couple of inches apart. At one end the bamboos are tapered down to form an opening of about eighteen inches; but from here the projecting ends are bent in criss-cross so as to protect this hole. Everything is lashed extra firm.

In this cage I place a lot of live fish, any kind, rather large. Also, dead fish are strung along on cords.

These cages, three or four of them, are lowered in places where the natives declare there are octopi, anywhere from fifty to a hundred and fifty feet deep, with a good line leading from a float on the surface, which carries a slim bamboo rod and a flag.

Your boy sits watching these, possibly with field glasses.

The octopus, crawling around down below and always looking for food, is attracted by this supply of fish. He circles about, creeps up close, grabs the bamboos and pulls them apart to get at his meal. Most of the fish swim away to the other end, and he falls into a frenzy; (the beasts act as if rage were their normal state) ; he strains these springy bamboo ends apart, twists and forces his body into the hole. Once inside, the bamboos spring back, penning him within.

Again he rages, thrusting some arms through the openings and trying to force his way out. Instead of that he moves the whole cage about; the flag on the surface goes up; the watching boy gives a shout; and we're off in the boat to haul him up.

It doesn't work all the time, by any means. He's such a powerful, slippery, elastic devil that he will frequently get a grip on the bottom between the bars and squeeze this contractible body through somewhere. If one is quick, however, a sudden jerk will break his suction. Then we yank him up and tow him swiftly to a pool that has been prepared—some safe place cut off naturally from the sea, or where you can block off the exit.

As soon as you drop the cage into this clear pool you can see the octopus get busy. A couple of snaky arms slip between the bars and fasten to the rock bottom; he strains and scratches and tears like a cornered beast. Presently he's out. Generally he tears this strong bamboo cage all to pieces.

If the bottom of the pool is smooth, you don't get much opportunity to study his habits: he's destined for a speedy death. He seems to know by instinct where the sea is; you may have had a terrible job to get the cage over the enclosing reef, or the rocks that shut off your pool—but right away he starts for ocean depths. He will not travel over land unless dropped on the earth: then he scuttles toward the sea.

Tearing at everything in the way, he runs on these curving legs over the rocks, trying to get out on that side. If hammered back with long bamboo poles,

he grabs them, fights, goes mad with anger. He seems to have no feeling at all. I've seen one eating his own arms, dashing against coral, biting himself or anything else, in a frenzy which makes human rages appear gentle.

Never, in such an open place, have I succeeded in keeping an octopus alive more than two hours. He literally tears himself to pieces.

I discovered, however, that if there is a deep place in the pool, with overhanging rocks or a sort of cave—some place where the creature could retire and not be seen—then he accepts the situation. He darts out of view into this hiding place; if you watch, you will see him lurking about; when you put in food, you can observe all his methods of stalking, of camouflaging and lying in wait, of shooting himself bodily at his prey. It is under these conditions that I have studied different ones for hours and days.

Rarely does the large octopus come to the surface. The babies swim or crawl right up on the beach and lie there sunning themselves. The big ones don't. They hate the surface. That is just like fire to them. It is easy to understand the mystery surrounding the creature when you observe how he loves the dark crevices and grottoes.

Capturing these beasts and watching them became a favourite pursuit of mine. I never thought of my narrow escape without first a shudder, then a renewed curiosity as to the beast which so nearly got me. And discovering such complete lack of exact knowledge

about him, I've had an ambition to find out enough to introduce him to the human world.

The most dramatic happenings in my observation pools were the fights between octopus and shark which we staged.

I've been told by nice people in cities that that was cruel. Being cruel to octopi is something like being flattering to a beautiful woman. It's what they live by.

And as for sharks! I know a few things about those babies too.

CHAPTER XIII

ON A CERTAIN UNFRIENDLINESS IN SHARKS

WHEN a pearl diver hears people heatedly discussing whether or no sharks will attack humans, he can only smile wearily. Those who consider that point even doubtful would do well to stay on dry land, in the island world, anyhow. We who work under water in tropical seas have plenty of positive information which outweighs all the negative theories.

Science has classified a hundred and fifty different species; those common along most Atlantic shores are generally among the smaller varieties; many of them

are far less dangerous than a barracuda. The lazy scavengers of many ports, too, who have formed the basis of much of the discussion, are often like the bears of Yellowstone Park. But there are others.

The shark is a fish which resembles the whale and other sea mammals in bringing forth living young instead of depositing eggs. The exact ichthyologists describe one species of tropical seas (*Carcharodon rondeletii*) as reaching a length of forty feet, with a jaw aperture of two feet; and represented by predecessors probably ninety feet long—since the *Challenger* dredged up gigantic teeth from the Pacific floor, five inches long and four across at the base.

For us, the ones which spell danger are: the great white shark, the tiger, the blue pointer, and, here and there, the mackerel shark.

To see a shark under water is quite another matter from viewing him at the surface or dead on the beach. A single glance at any one of the four mentioned is enough to send a chill to your backbone, no matter how many years you have been in the pearling industry. The more experienced you are, the quicker do you drop your shells and basket and make for the top.

That is how it is, and it cannot be any other way. Not only white men but the natives feel the same way. They may be semi-amphibious, as are the Polynesians and others; they may whisper legends of their shark-god ancestors; just the same, they give a wide berth to those cruising jaws of fierce triangular teeth. It's like coming suddenly on a tiger: you stop and watch

the playful antics of a cub—but if it's a grown beast you drop everything and run.

One recognizes these savage pirates at first glance. They have no resemblance to the lazy fish which loafs along, and nuzzles about the bait, and sometimes turns slowly over to swallow it. This thing down below is like a flash. Usually the first sign of its presence is just that: a flash of phosphorescence above you. The diving helmet and lines and especially the stream of air bubbles are strange to him, and he's apt to dart past above you and turn at least once. That gives you a chance. But many a diver has had a leg bitten off on the way up. Simple enough, with one snap of those cutting jaws, when the attacker runs, as these species do, anywhere from twelve to thirty feet in length.

On a reasonably calm day the alert diver has a warning before entering the water. You can usually see the dorsal fin cutting the surface about the lugger; and in shark waters a man is on the watch for precisely that threat. But in a moderate sea, the shark keeps well below the waves, not liking the chop. On those days, when it is just not too rough to go down, there is no surface warning, and a diver has to be on guard all the time.

The biggest of these enemies—also the most savage, active, and tricky—is the tiger shark. He doesn't look in the least like a tiger, showing a dirty-white belly and irregular brown splotches on the sides; but he does act like one. He's a born hunter, that fellow, and you need all your wits when he starts after you.

Fortunately, he rarely comes for a man in a diving suit in one direct dash: you get a glimpse of this gleam of the phosphorescence, where he has doubled in uncertainty at the ascending air bubbles and the helmet and is trying to size up this strange thing before tackling it. I believe he would not do that with a skin-diver, but would make one straight swoop.

As for the advantage a man has because a shark must turn over before attacking—that's all boloney as applied to the tiger shark. He has a mouth from which he can snap at any angle. Also, a twenty-foot tiger or white shark could chop off a diver's head, helmet and all, as if it were nothing; he'd swallow it, too, for he can take down anything.

That turning-over stuff seems to have come from people watching a shark following a slow-sailing boat. Then he will frequently circle about, turn and look at you: something is floating in the water—he rolls over, opens his mouth, and it glides in without any effort. When they fight each other, however, or when he goes for anything below, he doesn't bother with any turning. Once his mind is made up it's a straight dash—and he simply chops with those terrible saw-bladed jaws. I have seen a great white shark dart at quite a large sea turtle we were towing behind the lugger—and with one *snap* he chopped it right in half, shell and all. Those triangular cutting blades, with their serrated edges, slash like razors when clamped down with such power as a shark's jaw muscles possess.

I have witnessed fights between sharks: they will

sometimes actually leap clear of the water, snapping at each other, ripping out pieces of flesh in their rage. The mating season for them is anything but idyllic: two males will fight over a female in the bloodiest sort of combat. Shark wooing means shark slaughter, for they frequently kill each other at these times.

My first adventure with these sharks was at a little island called Bellona, just below the main Solomon group. The people here like those on Sikiana, seemed to be mainly an early colony of Polynesians who had held on to this insignificant spot, though all the larger islands are occupied by the wildest, most savage negroid Melanesians you can find anywhere—precisely the same condition which Captain Cook and other explorers found at various spots in the South Seas.

We'd been shifting the lugger about in the lee of this island and had a bit of a camp on the beach, with many of our belongings there.

This day Ro and Charlie were ashore about something, and I was nosing about under water, looking for shell, with only Jack aboard to tend me.

The bottom sloped rather steeply just there, and I was crawling around some overhanging rocks, searching this way and that for signs of pearl oysters.

Just as I worked myself past a shoulder of this formation something made me twist around and look up.

There was a half-grown tiger shark plunging at me. No warning whatever.

I slipped like an eel behind a rock, into a place where there wasn't room for him to navigate. "Damn

it," I said to myself. "That's funny." And he swooped past and shot off out of sight.

He was twelve or fifteen feet long, and he looked an ugly customer, quick as a cat, driving swiftly with his blade-shaped tail, and showing that wicked slit of a mouth.

I stepped cautiously out again into the open. On the instant he made another vicious dive at me. (Don't listen to any childish tales about sharks being half blind or guided by pilot fish: they can see farther than you can under water.)

"That's damned funny," I said to myself again.

I'd never seen a shark act that way. He must have been half starved, I suppose; or possibly he was just a bad actor. Anyhow, he was an ugly customer, full of pep, very fast, and with this new trick of lying in wait and watching like a cat at a rat hole.

"By God!" I thought. "This is past a joke."

I'd never been attacked before, and this beast was playing a game where he knew the rules and I didn't.

I lay doggo for quite a while. Stretching out and peering around, I could see nothing of the beggar. So at last I started to climb over this overhanging shoulder, expecting, as soon as I knew everything was clear, to signal I was coming up.

No sooner was I well out of my protection than this impudent hunter was at me once more. I had to scramble back in a hurry.

The thing was getting a bit serious. I was down sixty or seventy feet and had already been under a long while; it was time to go up, but my legs twitched

at the very thought of being hauled through the water sixty feet with this infernal creature ready to snap at me.

Still, I thought to myself, "Gee! I've got to do something pretty quick." So I took my knife in my hand and stepped out, ready for a battle.

The tiger was a little farther off than before, but he sighted me and swooped as usual. And by bad luck, at that instant my foot caught between two hunks of coral. Jerking it free, I almost fell sideways. I shifted my knife to the left hand and grabbed for my outlet valve with the other as I tried to regain balance. Somehow the knife dropped, and disappeared in a deep crevice.

I dashed back to cover and sat down. Now I was in for it. No knife, and this patient, ravenous devil after me! To add to it all, the cheeky beast had become so bold now that he cruised back and forth in plain sight, fairly daring me to come out.

It happened that some weeks before we had picked up several school slates at a missionary station; Jack was a comical fellow, and he would spend hours scribbling nonsense and drawing funny pictures on these slates. We had added to our code a signal to send down a slate, when there was some message the diver wanted to send, too complicated for the combinations of different numbers of pulls on life-line or air-hose.

I signalled for the slate. Down it came, a pencil dangling by a string. I hurriedly scrawled on it:

"Shark got me cornered. Lost knife."

Jack hauled it up when I tugged. I waited. There's a mean sense of helplessness in being down there in such a fix without even a knife to depend on.

Presently the slate descended again. No knife. What could that mean? I read the writing, in Jack's queer hand:

"Tell her you got a date already with that pretty Bellona girl."

Jack was the comedian of our party and kept us in roars of laughter continually. But I didn't appreciate his humour so much just then. No doubt that shark looked mighty different from where I was than from the deck of the lugger.

I knew there was something funny about it somewhere; but I sat down on the coral in my hole in the wall and wrote him a strong letter, explaining I was in a serious jam.

Again I waited anxiously. It was already past the period when I should have gone up for rest and air.

Once more the slate appeared:

"Sorry. No shark knife on board. Hustling man ashore. Keep up your nerve."

That was a facer for an instant. You see, a shark knife is quite different from an ordinary one. A shark's skin is incredibly tough, almost like a board, and we have special knives to tackle him. They're big, powerful blades of the best Sheffield steel, which we grind and sharpen to two razor edges and a needle point —in fact, we do use them for shaving but never for anything else. It's kept covered with vaseline, bright and ready. This weapon has a dagger handle, and

one carries it in a leather sheath, where it can be drawn in a single motion. It was some distance to our camp on the beach: there was a trying time ahead for me while a man rowed ashore and got a knife and rowed back.

However, there was no help for it. I lay close in my rock burrow and waited. But I sent up another slate message to Jack:

"Hurry knife all you can. When you get danger signal, pull like hell. Going to be a close squeak with me."

He understood by this time how serious matters were. I knew I could count on him for whatever he could do. But that distance to the surface looked like several times sixty feet as I thought about it.

Finally I got the signal. The knife came down. It was mighty comfortable to feel the grip in my hand and know I could at least do some damage when we came to close quarters.

I was not quite in line with the boat. But I crawled, knife in hand, muscles taut, around this projecting cliff so as to be in the shortest line to safety.

For some time I had seen nothing of my savage playmate in this game of hide-and-seek. Nor was he visible now, as I looked cautiously about. I began to hope he'd grown tired and departed to look for an easier meal.

Just as I straightened up, standing on the crest of this coral shoulder, I had a glimpse, through the edge of the face glass, of a big object plunging down at me.

At the same instant it seemed he was fairly on top of me.

I was enraged at being hunted in this way. Giving the danger signal, I struck this big knife into the shark with all my force, and it was a real satisfaction to feel it go home its full length.

But as I shot to the surface, I could have sworn my legs reached all the way to the bottom. I couldn't drag them up fast enough, expecting every instant to feel those jaws clamp on me in this helpless position.

He'd evidently had enough, with that blade in his belly, for we saw nothing more of him. I found myself on deck, gasping, and growing more outraged and angry the longer I thought of the incident. It made me extra careful from that time on—many a time I have shot up at the first warning flash, and then searched all the water to try to kill the brute; but it also left me with a sense of an unpaid score against the shark tribe; and I became expert in killing them and in taking them alive.

It's easy to hook them, but we worked out another method. We take a long heaving line, two to four hundred feet, with a spliced iron at one end, and make a lassoo of it. For about fifteen feet we twist wire close about it, forming a loop that will sink in the water. The mass of this line is coiled in a barrel, with everything clear to run in a hurry; just as in whaling.

We hook a hunk of meat to the end of another line. Then we scull around over these clear waters in a

dinghy, one man holding these two lines down in the water.

When a shark is sighted and starts for the bait, the fisherman keeps this on the opposite side of the loop. A big shark is wary; he will often refuse for a long time to go through the loop, six feet or so in diameter; but if the bait is jerked up and down he grows excited and afraid the thing will get away.

Presently his nerve is up sufficiently: he darts through the loop and grabs the meat.

The expert fisherman waits till the big dorsal fin is through. Then one sudden jerk fastens the rope around his smalls. Quickly the line is laid in a slot at the bow. For things happen.

A hook is one thing. A noose above the tail of an otherwise free, uninjured twenty-foot shark is something else again. When a big tiger or great white or blue pointer feels that rope tighten about him, he is like a torpedo.

S-z-z-z goes the line, fifty or a hundred feet at a jump. That's the time when you're in real trouble if anything fouls, since the rope fairly leaps out of the barrel, one coil on top of another.

As soon as we dare, two or three start hanging on to the rope. It means burned palms if you don't give line quickly when he rushes. But presently we're fast, and the boat is cutting through the water behind the runaway.

Wild sport, that is, sometimes. Liable to upset. Plenty of ways to have an accident. It stirs the blood though. I've ridden ten or fifteen miles in between

islands, lickety-split, faster than a good wind would take the lugger. After a while, if you play him, like an angler, the big fish becomes tired out; often that takes an hour or two, for it's like handling a foul-hooked salmon, only more so.

When he begins to turn easier, and you work up close to him—that's the moment when you need to watch out: he may wake up all at once, and if he is near enough alongside to give the boat a good bang—that's the end of your boat, and too close quarters for comfort.

Sooner or later, however, we get him in shape so we can hook a gaff, spliced to a fifteen-foot bamboo, into his tough jaw cartilage. (It seems to have no feeling whatever.) If you try to tow him tail first, he'll drown, because the water goes the wrong way through his gills. We learned to tow the beast head to; and we'd drag him over the coral reef or boulders into one of those clear little swimming pools such as I described as used for captive octopus. There have been places where I was forced to rig up block-and-tackle to get a big fellow over the reef.

When one of these monsters is turned loose in the pool he lashes the water, seems to stand on his head and on his tail, dashes here and there, goes crazy generally. Usually it takes hours for him to settle down.

I should really like to have present one of those gentlemen who consider sharks mild and inoffensive playmates, and invite him to go in swimming while that wild creature is expressing his nature.

Theorists as to the sweetness and light of undersea life demand that a witness must have "seen with his own eyes" a man bitten by a shark. Hardly a chance of that, out of a hundred attacks. I never saw anyone bitten in two; but, as related, I have been attacked; I have seen men who had been thus maimed; and I once missed being an eye-witness by only a few moments. This was at Coogee beach, on the ocean front of Sydney. When I arrived, a young fellow was lying on the shore, being given first aid. A man who saw the occurrence said the victim was swimming, not far from land; a blue pointer shark dashed at him and chopped his leg right off above the knee; incredibly, the young man swam almost to shore thus crippled, and was carried out by several men who had seen the whole thing.

The sea is a perpetual battleground anyhow. I could twist the neck of a man I've known of who trained dogs for circus acts. But shark and octopus —theirs is a never-ending feud; I merely enabled myself to witness what must go on all the time, unseen, in the depths of the world where I've done most of my work.

CHAPTER XIV

DUEL BETWEEN SHARK AND OCTOPUS

HAVING learned how to capture both these underwater menaces alive and install each in a pool where it presently felt at home, with plenty of room and proper conditions, it was natural that we should wonder what would happen if they were brought together.

We found out.

A prizefight or bullfight is a dull, slow, stupid, bloody business beside the meeting of these two; and to anybody who has witnessed their innate savagery and apparent lust for slaughter it would be in the highest degree ridiculous to sentimentalize over the

feelings of either. A Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Sea Murderers would need to do a lot of educational work among divers.

Some of these natural or artificial pools were about twenty-five feet deep, and so utterly clear that one could see a pin on the bottom. It proved to be possible to manœuvre these monsters somewhat, by means of an old diving hose, well perforated: with a pair of canoes and men pumping, the stream of air bubbles could often be used to drive the octopus out of hiding.

The effect on a shark from the mere sight of a big octopus is most extraordinary. I've never known it to fail. Even when the big fish has become quite contented in his roomy quarters, with plenty of food—that first glimpse of his enemy seems to drive him crazy. He dashes up and down and across and about at his utmost speed, darts to the surface, hurling spray high in the air, behaves really like a savage working himself up in a war dance.

As for the octopus—no words can picture the sudden furtive swiftness, the deadly hidden purpose of his movements. I say again, he is the greatest living actor in all the world. And he's more.

When that bad dream of a creature rears up at the bottom on his eight long snaky arms, and his little slanting eyes steadily watch the mad gyrations of the excited shark near the surface—the watcher knows that this is the king of the undersea world. I see there's one species the scientists have christened *Octopus*

superciliosus: you'd think it a good name if you saw the vicious, haughty confidence of him. You don't see how he's going to prove it, yet you'd back him to take on a pair of twenty-footers, either of which could snap him down at a mouthful. He's fierce and proud. The other is wildly nervous, for all his bulk.

Moreover—I don't know how—you sense that as usual the strange beast is filled with a cold rage, which will stop at nothing but which leaves him in perfect control of all his startling powers.

Soon the octopus begins to manœuvre for position. He's like a boxer sparring. He feints this way and that, crawls slowly, darts sideways, dodges a rush, shoots backward—always working with a definite plan: to get safely close enough to charge. It makes no difference to him how long all these preliminaries take: he's always waiting, always ready when the instant arrives.

Then that powerful, sudden hydraulic drive of his explodes into action: he shoots himself at his enemy so fast that the eye cannot follow his motion.

Sometimes he misses, and it's thrilling to see the address with which he curves to one side, gathers himself together, begins all over again.

Sooner or later one of these catapultings of himself is too swift for his active opponent. There's a flash, a blur—and the octopus is locked fast to the shark's neck, those thug's arms wound about and holding on by their leechlike suckers.

That's when you get white water flying! No time

then to be in the spectator's place with collar and tie: one gets soaked through and through as the great fish dashes madly about, trying to unseat this Old Man of the Sea.

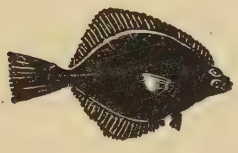
The octopus merely grips like a vise and takes his ride. The shark can't often rub him against the rocks without injuring himself—though once or twice I did see him dart under an overhanging reef and bang the octopus so hard it was knocked senseless and both creatures died. He tries mainly to get rid of him by leaps and plunges and turns and speeding like a runaway horse.

No living creature, however strong, can keep up that first frenzied activity. Presently the shark is speeding under water, and you can see all his movements. He'll slacken for a moment, then spurt wildly again, round and round, as if he were in a six-day bicycle race, gradually working into deeper water.

Generally this keeps up from half an hour to an hour. The end is always the same: the great shark, with this fleshy ball still fast to his neck, sinks down to the bottom.

That's his finish. There may be a few kicks, some last convulsive efforts, but he's done. The octopus gets a couple of his anchors out, and appears to strangle his enemy. I can only suppose his sucker-armed nooses shut off the shark's gill-flaps and force him to drown himself. I've never seen any marks of the powerful beak on the shark's throat, though the rips of the suckers are sometimes visible; there's no attempt to eat him when he's dead. His job is done.

He knows how to take care of himself, that cunning monster. After studying him for years, he still remains for me the most mysterious, startling, many-sided, deadly creature of land or sea.



GELATINOUS
UNICELLULAR SEA
GROWTH

CHAPTER XV

CANNIBALS ON MALAITA

WE FOUR "Pearl Vikings" set forth on top of the wave. There was not a cloud on our sky. Linked together by similar tastes and instinctive friendship, with time for whatever might befall, we were bound east into the unknown, "for to admire and for to see."

My own mind, largely because of Ro and his stories, was fixed upon Polynesia. That name is often used loosely for all the islands of the Pacific, but properly it refers to the eastern division of these multitudinous and varied isles.

East of New Guinea a great band of the globe's surface, stretching for a hundred degrees of longitude, and from above Cancer to just below Capricorn, contains amid countless leagues of ocean 2,650 named islands and groups. That's the *Index* total, excluding the enormous number of puzzling duplications of names. But a single named atoll may consist of many islets; there are scores and hundreds of tiny spots, invisible on all but detail charts, yet real enough to the sea wanderer. I have no doubt one would have to multiply that 2,650 many times to get the true tally. And it would take several lifetimes to chronicle the different peoples, habits, individual peculiarities.

Three great divisions, however, can be made, broadly representing quite contrasting races: Melanesia—including the Solomon, Louisiade, Santa Cruz, Loyalty, New Hebrides, Bismarck, Fiji, and New Caledonia groups; Micronesia (where the Melanesian-Papuan blends with the true Polynesian), embracing the Gilberts, Carolines, Marshalls, Pelews, Marianas, and Guam; and Polynesia proper—the America, Cook, Ellice, Manihiki, Phœnix, Tokelau, Tonga, Hawaii, Marquesas, Tubuai, Society, Samoa, and, above all, Tahiti and Paumotu groups.

There was plenty ahead of us to satisfy even my craving for novelty.

We headed first for North Australia and Torres Strait. Not that any of us were particularly anxious to fish those waters, but merely because of the south-

easterly wind. What I heard of that region kept me sailing east: good beds there, but the experiences of my chums sounded like my own aboard those miserable sailing vessels. Justly or not, I got a picture of hard-boiled white skippers, tricky Japs and Filipinos, and a general atmosphere of greed and brutal indifference toward others, which was precisely what I'd been striving to escape from. I don't mean they were pirates or hijackers: but Ro, whom I trusted utterly, had been there many times, and he'd found the average pearler of those parts a man one didn't want to meet a second time.

With three staunch friends, and my own boat under me, and a thousand pounds in my belt, I had no intention of getting back into that. We decided to give all that coast the go-by. Better find ourselves among the cannibals of the Solomons, we declared, than in such a depressing crowd. Oddly enough, one of our first memorable adventures was to be with those very cannibals.

At the beginning of our cruise, as we drew away from Macassar, I tried to establish the spirit I hoped would prevail among our little company. Though I was captain and owner, we had no formal agreement or organization: I suggested that we share the mean job of cooking, turn and turn about, and offered to take the first week's spell at it myself.

When I served up the first meal Charlie's face was a study. He took a few tastes, and then he burst out:

"My God, Victor! You're a wonderful fellow—but as a cook you're terrible."

Jack tried his hand, but he was just as complete a total loss to our only gastronomer. Ro knew all the native ways, and he succeeded with some of these dishes; but he too had become accustomed to fo'c'sle grub, and to Charlie these messes were much the same as blasphemy to a missionary. Unpopular as the cook's chore is at sea, Charlie finally couldn't stand our stuff.

"Say," said he. "Something's got to be done about this. These places we're bound for sound terrible to me. I guess we got to be well and strong to tackle them. At this rate there'll be no guts aboard this lugger to face anything. You fellows better elect me cook, damn you."

We made that unanimous on the spot. Charlie started in as chef. A Chinaman offers things to his stomach as he does to his joss; besides, Charlie's people must have been well off, and he was accustomed to the best. He had lived at the first-class hotels, had sailed as first-cabin passenger, knew what was what when expense was no object.

Certainly he was an expert. We had fare which I suppose was never duplicated on a pearling lugger; and Charlie almost forgave us for forcing him into the job in his pleasure over our enthusiastic praise.

Ro was in charge of our commissary. He could make a blank-looking strange island produce chickens and fruit and vegetables and turtle's eggs as magically as Moses made the rock gush water. He was a past master in the lore of food fish—which were poisonous at certain atolls, which were never safe,

and all the rest. No fear of lacking fresh food of many varieties with him for guide. So we lived high and sailed in high feather.

After a long period of beating eastward we struck the Melville islands, at the northern tip of Australia. We were close to Port Darwin. At that time I doubt if there were five thousand people in the whole huge Northern Territory, with its half million square miles and far-flung coast line; any settlement had an attraction for seamen, and this was the centre of a lively pearling industry. But so strong was our feeling about the people of those parts, that we didn't go there at all. We did have a try at some beds Ro and Jack knew of, well out from land, farther along the coast: the water was deep, the shell didn't look particularly promising, and our hearts were not in it, somehow. Shortly we were on our way again.

We picked up some good shell beyond there and sold it to a trader going through Torres Strait. Then we loafed across the Gulf of Papua and worked a little along the lower New Guinea coast; it was small shell there, valueless, but we managed to bag quite a few little pearls. We moved on east, past the Louisiade archipelago, toward the Solomons.

We four had now been together a number of months, in that closeness of association which a small boat necessitates. Ordinarily in such a group there'll always be some who tease or play tricks on the others, from ill-nature or boredom. To my delight, there'd been nothing of the sort with us. We got along perfectly: working the boat, telling yarns, singing, mak-

ing expeditions ashore, catching fish, doing our diving and shell-gathering. And we were never bored; there were too many new things to interest us. There was no doubt that we belonged together, in that life.

Really we were bound for a little bit of an island, Sikiana, east of the sprawling Solomon group which is splashed over a length of seven or eight hundred miles. Ro was always most eloquent when he began to recite early legends of his people, four thousand miles away, across the Pacific, below Tahiti. I understand the ethnologists now incline to accept the basic idea in some of these folk tales: that the original Polynesians were a Caucasian race, which at a very remote date migrated southeasterly across the Pacific, perhaps from one island group to another, at last settling permanently in Samoa and Tahiti and spreading to other islands. Traces of the stock are still observable in the Malay archipelago (notably in Mentawi, west of Sumatra) and in many other places where they have mixed with the local peoples. But in Sikiana, Ro declared, protected by remoteness from the savage Solomons on one side and the equally savage Santa Cruz on the other, the inhabitants were almost pure Polynesians. And on what that meant, compared with the negroid fuzzyheads, Ro waxed more eloquent than ever.

There were pearls there. But we wanted to see those girls he told about. That was the plain truth of it.

We sailed along, stopping here and there, and found ourselves off Malaita. That doesn't look like much of a place on your ordinary maps; yet it's a hundred

miles long by thirty wide, and no white man has ever crossed the mountains of its backbone. Bad medicine up there.

Several natives, "salt-water boys," whom we'd taken on from a neighbouring island, pleasant fellows enough, warned us against landing there. In fact, they seemed terrified at the very name. We had to get water, however, and hoped to pick up fresh provisions as well; and in our ignorance we decided their fear was probably due to some petty warfare between them and the Malaita folk.

So we stood up to the mouth of a river, which they told us had falls near the coast, loaded our dinghy with the water barrels and two splendid canoes we'd bought at the last island, and prepared to explore for fresh water.

It had been arranged that Charlie should stay in charge of the lugger. When he heard these natives chattering about the danger, he wouldn't stand for that.

"These boys are all right," he declared; "they can handle the lugger all right. Let's all stick together."

We simply couldn't make him stay. All four of us set out in the dinghy, carrying some revolvers we had, and putting in several bottles of gin and an old-fashioned Edison gramophone—one of those early cylinder arrangements—which we'd found very useful in making friends with the natives everywhere.

There was no reef off the mouth of this river: it opened direct to the sea, with low land on each side instead of the usual precipitous headlands. There

were occasional patches of mangrove swamp, and a forest growth that looked impenetrable, ranging from the palms near tidewater up to the sandalwood and ebony of the high hills.

We rowed slowly up, keeping a sharp lookout. We had seen not the slightest sign of life; but in venturing among those savages you have to be in the frame of mind of the nervous woman who knew there were stealthy burglars in the house because she hadn't heard a sound. Like my shark acquaintance, they see you long before you see them.

The river wasn't very wide, even at its mouth, and it kept getting steadily narrower as we advanced; there was very little fall, too: it seemed as if we'd travelled for miles, yet we were still in tidewater.

Everything was silent and mysterious. We didn't see even one of those queer horned frogs with teeth they have there—nothing but some parrots and a monster rat, and one big snake slipping through the still water. It got on one's nerves after a while. One had a sense that there must be something back of this mask of reserve. Instinctively we rowed without noise or splashing.

All at once Ro held up his hand. The two at the oars stopped. The boat slowed up and hung there, since there was hardly any current. We stared at the Polynesian in the bow, then all about, uncertain what had come to his keen senses.

"Falls," he said softly, pointing to the right.

We cocked our ears in that direction. Presently we made out a gentle, pervasive sound which filled

the forest and the air with a subdued murmur, like the sound of the surf far away.

"Far away," I remarked.

"Not too far," declared Ro. We went on, more quietly than ever.

Around the next bend we found a feeder stream coming into the narrowing river from that side. Ro pointed up it, indicating that our most likely road lay there.

Halting a moment, we listened again. The steady, low musical note was plainer than before: unmistakably a waterfall.

That wall of forest looked anything but hospitable, and I knew by experience how deceptive the noise of a cataract is in the deep woods: you can't estimate its distance within miles. I tasted the water of this feeder stream: it was still quite brackish. Fresh water we must have.

"All right; let's go," I said quietly.

But Ro was still listening, a puzzled frown on his face. We all cupped our hands behind our ears, straining our hearing to make out what he had picked up now.

Pretty soon I got it: at intervals other sounds played over the surface of that persistent deep whisper. Yes, there was the monotonous throb of drums; and, mingled with it, faint but unmistakable, punctuating bursts of outcry from high-pitched human voices.

We four glanced at each other. I expected we all looked a bit solemn and questioning.

"No good," remarked Ro. "Big time there. These bushboys no good."

I didn't like the looks of things myself. It was getting late in the afternoon also; we were liable to get

CANNIBAL FEAST

caught by night. After all that trouble, though, I hated to sneak back, without our water, tails between our legs. A white man in the tropics does a lot of things that scare him stiff just because he mustn't show yellow before the natives. Funny that it's mostly vanity that makes him boss at critical times.

"We came for water," said I. "It sounds to be ahead yonder. Let's go."

That Rapa boy was certainly a wonderful comrade. I can see now that time and again, in all sorts of

small emergencies, he must have known lots of things the rest of us didn't appreciate; and he knew he knew better, too. Right at the moment he smelt trouble ahead. All he did was to flash those white teeth in a smile, grab a paddle, and whirl the dinghy's bow into this creek. We started up its narrow, winding ribbon of water.

This was travelling right through the jungle, rowing though we were. The big trees from each side met over our heads; dismal swamp and snaky mangrove roots lined the margins; it was the last place one would choose to explore, in that sort of country, with darkness coming on. We needed no warning to use the utmost caution to proceed noiselessly.

Moreover, though it became steadily narrower, it seemed endless. On and on we paddled and poled. The murmur of the waterfall grew louder, yet our constant expectation of seeing its white thread through the dusk was as constantly disappointed. The thing became like a nightmare, with something ahead which one can never reach. The shouts and yells and fragments of wild song became clearer too: evidently some tribe, off beyond in the jungle, was having a big feast, what they call a "corroboree" in the Australian bush.

And still the black water beneath the dinghy was brackish.

Then, after an hour or more of this, our real difficulties began, as we shoved into a stretch of fallen trees lying submerged across the stream. The dinghy

slid up on the first one and came to a stop, almost upsetting. It was black night now.

Ro slid overboard and found we could wade. We managed to shove the dinghy back and made it fast to the bank. Then we started forward again, with the two canoes and the water barrels.

That was an exasperating hole to get through in the darkness. We'd paddle a few strokes, and the canoe would hit a fallen tree or ease up on a sunken one. Then it was out barrels, pass them under or over the obstruction, lift the canoe past, and try once more. A dozen strokes—and do it all over again. Pitch dark, stumbling, scraping the skin off knuckles, barking shins, sinking into oozy mud underfoot. And always that maddening steady sound of the elusive falls ahead.

Most of the time it was like splashing through some fantastic, endless wet tunnel, so closely was this waterway hemmed in by the matted vegetation.

A hundred times in those exhausting hours I wanted to suggest turning back. Doubtless the others felt the same. But no one liked to be the first to give in. I wonder how many explorers have met death from starting at something and having their pride say, "Hell! I can't turn back now." (Also how many triumphs have resulted from the same thing!) It began to seem as if we were doomed to spend the rest of our lives floundering along in that blind, hopeless mess, straining up barrels, freeing canoes, pulling feet through slime, dripping dirty water. It was a crazy business.

The falls, always just a little clearer, drew us like a magnet. We didn't stop to reason any longer. We just kept going.

All at once we pushed through a tangled mass of branches and vines which had completely shut off the view beyond. And at the sight which met us, we "froze" right there, crouching in the water beside our canoes and barrels. For some little time we had heard none of the wild shouting which had come to us so long. The scene in front of us was a complete and startling surprise.

There was a large clear space by the stream, with the elusive waterfall just beyond. A huge fire blazed, sparks and flare and smoke rising high—it seemed impossible we could have failed to see the glare long before.

Round this crackling blaze sat a whole crowd of the ugliest looking savages I ever laid eyes on, feasting like animals. It was only too obvious what their fare was: a mere boy nearest to us (and we'd come out almost in their midst) was gnawing away at a human arm. The others, perhaps thirty or forty in all, were all similarly occupied, tearing and snarling as if they were so many wild beasts.

The sudden horror paralyzed all our faculties for some moments. Then we felt each other's hands groping about. One clasped the other tight. We drew into a compact little group. In hoarse whispers we consulted. Too many to hope to put them to flight by a surprise assault. Fatal probably to attempt to with-

draw: they'd be bound to hear our scraping and splashing.

Just then the tom-toms broke loose again in an excited, irregular rhythm. One after another, these smeared cannibals leaped up and began to dance, chanting a guttural song of ferocious triumph.

The whole clearing was lighted up as one thrust fresh logs into the blaze. Still unable to move, we watched this devil's dance; there was something about these creatures and their foul rejoicing which actually chilled the blood,in spite of all the jokes about cannibals back in civilization. Their flickering, lengthening shadows danced and capered more grotesquely than they did.

This lasted possibly five minutes. Then came the inevitable discovery. A big bedaubed chap, facing our way, sprang out of the circle, pointed his bloody arm at us, barked shrill alarm. The whole gang rushed toward our corner, some picking up spears and shields.

Without exaggeration, they seemed to us veritable fiends out of hell. They're not handsome at best; now they were all half-intoxicated with some devil's brew they make from a root, and completely so from their mad dance; evidences of their ghoulish meal were all over them. My mouth was so dry it tasted like wool.

My revolver was out. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Ro, his gun levelled also; and both the others were standing up, ready to do as much damage as possible to that howling mob before they got us.

Just as our fingers were about to press the triggers a huge fellow with elaborate decorations, evidently a chief, leaped in front of the charging crowd, shaking his ax and letting out a yell that could have been heard a mile away.

That halted them. They stood there in plain view, while he jabbered and clucked at them, evidently warning them against rushing us. Every now and then we could see one of the younger ones make an impatient start to break away; but the leader would threaten him with his weapon and force him back into line. He was rather young, this chief, but full of quickness and energy. I never saw a man work harder than he did to hold those cut-throats.

A boy threw on a lot of fresh wood. The flames leaped up so we could see the reflections in the muddy-white eyeballs. As I looked at those horrible faces, only a few steps away, I had the same sensations I have described from glimpsing the eyes of that Papuan on the New Guinea coast, only more so.

A man who has for years knocked about, as I have, on the rough edges of the world, is apt to be no longer deeply shocked by anything. He comes across plenty of brutality, and perversion, and degradation from which he may turn away in disgust; but it rarely shakes him way inside: he has seen or heard of pretty much everything in that line of which unrestrained human nature is capable; there is no jolt of horrified surprise. It's surprising how soon you exhaust the possibilities of perverted imagination on all that side.

I had thought I'd heard enough of cannibalism to

be in the same position in regard to that. Yet there was an inexpressible horror about this. It was not mainly our danger, not directly what those brutes had been at—but the truly loathsome expression of their faces, the strange, stupefied man-beast stare of their dead-fish eyes.

That made one's stomach turn right over. I suppose it was due to a cloudy realization that these were not clean beasts, acting out their nature, but men deliberately turning themselves into beasts, wallowing in an unholy ritual, violating that oldest and most universal of all human tabus, the basis of man's entire fabric of intercourse.

I knew there was a prickling down my back, and a clammy hand squeezing my heart, and a cramp that promised retching, during the ten minutes that chief harangued the sullen, ferocious mob.

There was a wild yell from behind the crowd; a newcomer came out of the forest and ran up to the chief. He'd evidently come a long way, and seemed to be making a report. I figured out he must have been a lookout, posted miles away on some ridge overlooking the sea, and was bringing word of having sighted the lugger. These savage bushboys are afraid of white men in vessels.

Anyhow, with this added to whatever authority he had, the chief now drove them back a dozen or two yards nearer the fire. Then he strode back close to us—an ugly, powerful devil he was.

When he was within half a dozen paces I pointed

my finger at him. That meant "Stop." He understood it too.

Standing there, he waved his hands as if trying to tell us we would not be harmed. That was all right as far as it went; but the crowd behind was restless and yapping like angry dogs every now and then, so we held our guns ready and watched for the first sign of trickery.

There was no question but we had to get away promptly, if we expected to do it at all. I tried him with the usual signal: holding up a water barrel.

He got that too; even these inland rascals knew about filling up with fresh water. He beckoned to us to bring them along and pointed to the white splash of the waterfall just beyond. The whole gang was between us and it, however, and they were showing all the time how they felt about it.

"Think we better hit the breeze," remarked Charlie. "No show if we get in the thick of 'em."

"No," I declared, with a confidence which didn't go very deep. "We get 'em stopped, we and our pal here. We make a try, after all this. Keep your eyes on them."

I took one barrel, stood it on end in front of the leader, and pointed first to him, then to the fall, then back to myself.

He was quick, that chap. Right away he caught up the barrel, carried it back to the fire, grabbed hold of two youngsters, and made them take it to the cascade and fill it. Then he picked it up as if it were still empty and brought it to me.

One by one we filled the casks in this fashion, pouring out some water when we got them, till they were only about three quarters full—with just enough buoyancy to float barely submerged, for easier handling going down that infernal stream. All the time this chief was watching his men like a cat, just holding them by his personality.

I'm sure he'd seen white men close before. When the barrels were all filled and in the stream he came right up, put an arm about my shoulder, and pointed down stream, saying something earnestly. I didn't know a word of his language, but I could translate that well enough: it meant, "Go—and be damned quick about it."

We went.

As we faced them before pushing through that last barricade, the nervousness we'd all felt exploded in Ro.

"Let's drop a few before we leave," he laughed—just as a fellow says something absurd after a show that's stirred him all up. It wasn't even necessary to say, "No," to it. We were off on that ridiculous, impossible, crazy trip, bobbing those barrels under the obstructing logs or lifting them over, pushing, straining—turning around every few seconds in expectation of a rear attack.

They didn't try that, but we could hear them back in the jungle, working along down stream, and once in a while we'd see their torches. When we reached the second canoe, which we'd left quite a way down, there were three or four of the brutes messing about

with it. It was plain they were hillmen, for they were capsizing, one by one, almost as fast as they stepped in. In point of fact, they did belong to a mountain tribe which had raided a village of the salt-water boys, killed and looted to their hearts' content, and were celebrating their triumph with the proper man-eaters' ritual of drugged feasting when we blundered in on their ceremony.

This bunch drew off quickly when we came up, guns showing. We pressed on down in the blackness, and after hours and hours we reached the dinghy again.

I tell you it was sweet to feel that boat shooting down the main river toward the sea! I guess we crowed and bragged and pretended a bit. The truth was we had been incredibly lucky. By all the probabilities we should have been long-pig ourselves at daybreak, instead of climbing aboard that beautiful little lugger, which never looked more like home than then.

For these bushboys of Malaita are bad to-day and always have been. As I stated, no white man has ever been across the centre of the island, and in few places is it safe to venture a mile inland, no matter how friendly the salt-water boys along the shore.

Since my last trip to the islands, in 1928, I hear that a visiting British official and several of his men were surprised by a party of these savages and all slaughtered. It's the most unfriendly island *I* know.

Indeed, often as I've been told tales of cannibalism close by, this was the single time in my whole South

Sea experience when I knew I had it before my eyes. There was no doubt about this: we all saw the unpleasant details.

I never had any special desire to explore Malaita again.

CONCH SHELL

HAWK'S-BILL TURTLE

CHAPTER XVI

SONG AND DANCE

WE FOUR were all distinctly of the active, adventure-loving type. Probably what the scientists call "natural selection" would have ensured that, considering the casual, impulsive way we came together. Anyhow, while we all responded to the ease and freedom of this life, we had little inclination when work was over to sit aboard the lugger and dream; we had to get ashore and look for some life and excitement. Many a time we had landed where most white men would want a detachment of soldiers before setting foot on the beach—and we got away with it,

because we learned a few facts about native psychology.

There was one quality we had in common, proving of great value in these uncertain encounters, which could hardly have been deduced from our manner of meeting—except in the case of Charlie, who, as I have related, first became intimate with me on hearing me sing Uncle's Chinese ditty. This was a natural taste for music and rhythm, which enabled us to pick up the airs, even the words, of the songs and chanteys which play so large a part in savage life.

To live as an islander (which we were doing, except for our constant search for shell, and diving, and travelling about) a man must join naturally in the swimming, canoeing, singing, music, and dancing. Those are not just accomplishments but fundamental activities, on which most of the daily existence is based. By strange and lucky chance each one of us three white men could contribute something here. Ro, of course, being a Polynesian, found it natural as breathing.

Without any previous plan, we began by picking up some of the native drums, beaten lightly with the palm of the hand, which furnish the rhythmic stimulus for most of the group activities. These are scooped out of hardwood logs, just like the fine canoes; it must have been a job in the old days when their cutting tools were made of stone, or bone, or shell: nowadays they usually have adzes which they've gotten from the traders, and they understand how to work and temper metal. Even at present it's mighty skillful

work (and plenty of patience) that's needed for the operation.

We made various improvements on these drums, and soon found we could duplicate the rhythms used in various dances. Then we had big spiral conch shells for horns—it's amazing what volume of sound you can get from those, and different shapes give varied notes; besides, we had rattles, and Chinese whistles, and, of course, the gramophone.

I rather think that was the most extraordinary band in the world. Perhaps it was merely because my ears had grown so accustomed to barbarous noises, but some of our adaptations and improvisations seemed like music to me. Certainly we worked off a lot of youthful steam in this way.

On board, when I'd come up to rest from a dive, or in the evening, Jack and Charlie would begin to chant or dance or hum something we'd heard at the last place; it might be just an odd broken rhythm; the others would chime in. Perhaps it wouldn't quite satisfy us, and we'd change it or add to it. Or it might be some bit of a melody someone recalled—Malay, Chinese, Polynesian, anything: we'd all fill it out or alter it. Or a whole native love song or war chantey or dance would have stuck in our minds: we'd practise it again and again, correcting each other.

And presently the "band" would have a new piece in its repertoire, or there would be a new dance for the quartette of amateur troupers.

Besides the fun we got out of it, I think nothing else could have served so well as an introduction to

the strange people we were continually having to meet; and more than once it was this music frolic of ours which helped us out of a fix.

I remember particularly one time off Malaita.

Yes, we went back to that unpleasant island. There were rumours of shell beds, quite a distance from the river where we had our cannibal adventure, and, of course, nothing could hold young pearlers back from such possibilities.

We didn't find anything comparable to the tales that had brought us; and we did have the humiliation of landing the lugger hard and fast on a reef. She wouldn't come off with any lift of the tide.

Those tides among the Solomons are a hopeless mystery, anyhow. Nobody can make head or tail of them. Sometimes—generally at half moon—it would be high tide for twenty-four hours on end, and we could dive right along throughout the whole period. At other times it would be slack water for only half an hour, so we could get in a mere hour's work before the strong currents started. There are hundreds and hundreds of islands, big and little, and this whole archipelago seems to be physically one with the Bismarcks and New Guinea—with much deeper ocean to the east; and the channels are notorious for tricky and dangerous currents.

Anyhow, we were stuck tight beyond benefit of tide. And something had to be done about it. There was no help to be looked for anywhere except ashore at Malaita. We had plenty of reason for knowing that was bad country, even without the many tales

we'd heard; we looked at each other—and we were all seeing and thinking the same thing. However, there wasn't any choice.

"Come on, boys," said I at last. "Here's where we put on the gramophone act again."

We had made a watertight box into which the gramophone and records fitted, with enough air space to float the whole thing if the canoe upset. We put this in, with some tobacco and a bottle of squareface; also a couple of rifles. With revolvers strapped on, we paddled in: two of us landed on the beach with this bait; the others sat ready outside.

The thick bush was blank and silent, but we knew the beggars were in there watching us. I spread a square of canvas on the sand and placed the gramophone on it, with some tobacco on the side nearest the unseen savages. Then we moved back a few steps and waited.

That's one of the secrets in dealing with wild tribes: never be in a hurry. You'll get nowhere with them unless you act as if you were prepared to stay quiet for a week. Then their curiosity begins to work for you.

So we settled ourselves as though we hadn't a care in the world. Just waiting there in the sunlight. Though we seemed to be paying no attention, we were keeping the closest kind of watch on that wall of trees and undergrowth.

At last a native stepped cautiously out into view.

He stopped, looking suspiciously at us and at the stuff on the ground. Then we could hear a ripple of

guttural laughter behind the screening leaves: evidently there was a big crowd hidden there.

This reconnoitring individual came forward a few steps, stopped again; his staring eyes watched us just as a strange dog coming to a pan of meat watches a man beside it for some indication of friendliness or treachery.

He was so hesitant about it that I took up the tobacco and put it down a dozen steps nearer to him. At that he grabbed it and retreated in a hurry. But his head twisted about so he could look at the gramophone. He couldn't understand what that was.

It wasn't many minutes before his report, and their natural inquisitiveness, produced results: out came the chief, with this first fellow and half a dozen more. They walked right down to us.

I handed him some more tobacco. While he took it, it was clear that all their minds were on that mysterious gramophone. He'd bend down to look at it, then straighten up to stare at me with a struggle to comprehend.

"Uh, saa-a, waa-a," was what his exclamation sounded like. Then he beckoned with his spear, and the whole crowd, nearly a hundred strong, came pouring down from the bush.

They dropped down on their hands and crawled around that thing like a pack of baboons, examining it and clucking out exclamations. It was all brand new to them. When their black faces turned up, it was almost pitiful to see the effort in them as they strained their minds to think what it could be. Every

now and then this absorption would make them forget all about us, and they would caper about and wave their arms and attempt to explain to each other.

Then I started a record: first a man's voice, reciting; then a lively march. That was a sensation.

Most of them started to run away. A box that sang was too much magic for them. The chief stood his ground, however, and they all came back. When it stopped they almost stuck their noses into the gramophone, trying to find the man they thought must be somehow concealed in it.

I gave a drink to the leader and a couple of his chief men. Finding they were now all properly impressed and friendly, I made a sign to Jack and Charlie in the canoe. As we had arranged, they paddled off to the lugger, rigged a couple of long, new ropes to stout stanchions, and brought the ends ashore.

By signs I tried to get the leader to order his men to tail on and help us pull. That was a job. They were well disposed enough by this time, but they didn't particularly care to make any effort, and they had no idea of working together.

I gave some more gin to the leaders and put a couple of them ahead of each rope. The rest were laughing and grabbing hold, but they were just a mob, some pulling for a moment, then quitting. Nothing could be accomplished that way, and I was at my wit's end.

It was Charlie who solved the problem. All at once he dashed out to the boat, and came back presently with the drums.

We four lined up. Charlie began a quick beat with his palm. We started off on a war dance Ro had taught us. This was a Polynesian dance, which they do before they charge the enemy. It works up and up till everybody is in a frenzy; then the leader gives a wild yell which means "Charge!"—and the whole party is off into the forest to the attack.

These Malaitans caught the excitement all right. We worked them up to the boiling point; Ro got about fifty hanging on to each rope; and finally, just at the climax, we jumped ahead of the ropes and let out a shout that could have been heard up on the mountain.

They "charged," too, those black boys. All together, in perfect unison, they put their backs into it.

The two new ropes straightened out, stiff as iron bars. Charlie drummed frantically. We danced forward. And, by God! the lugger slid in off that beastly reef as slick as you please. I believe we could have made those hundred excited savages walk her right up the beach.

They were very black, these Malaita boys, much darker than any Malay, or even most of the New Guinea tribes. They are a crazy lot; you mustn't hit one of them, or he'll spring at you like a tiger.

It's a remarkable island altogether. With nearly two thousand five hundred square miles, and mountains in the centre about five thousand feet high, it has any number of tribes: I think there must be about a hundred and fifty thousand people on it. Yet, as I said, no living white man has been across it. The Brit-

ish control this entire group now, and they have been trying to conquer the whole place slowly and peacefully; yet they have succeeded in penetrating merely a couple of miles into the interior, and the very traders and recruiters know nothing about the swarms of savages farther back.

It was only two years ago that I met a deputy commissioner I knew, who'd been in charge there four years. "We're winning out," he said. "Every year we're pushing a bit farther in." At the same time he warned me to be careful, for there was no counting on some of the people from the hills: "I'm not sure of them myself."

The latter part of this was better founded than his optimism. As I was on my way back to civilization, I read a radio telegram on the steamer coming into Honolulu: he and sixteen police boys had been wiped out there. The deputy was on his boat, anchored off the beach; and one of those bush tribes sneaked down from the hills, swam out, and butchered the lot, cutting off their heads for trophies.

Malaita is almost unique in that respect. Except for a few places in the Gilberts and Santa Cruz and New Hebrides, I know of no other island which is really dangerous for an experienced man. As a rule, if you behave yourself, you can go anywhere with safety.

In these mountainous islands there are some bush-boys who know nothing about the sea; the tribes on the coast, however, make marvellous canoes and are perfectly at home in them. Especially at Isabel and

in Santa Cruz do they show extraordinary skill, sometimes working this very hard wood down to an eighth of an inch in thickness. It's a sight to see their big war canoes, with twenty, thirty, fifty paddlers—a sight which is apt to spell trouble. When a warship comes on a punitive expedition, to put the fear of the whites into an island, the most important part of the job is not the shelling, but finding these war canoes and carrying them off or destroying them: as long as they remain, an outbreak is merely at any moment a matter of getting worked up in a dance.

The Malaitan generally carries a comb in his fluffy hair and anoints it with some oil he considers cleansing; his ears are cut out and perforated so he can put ornaments in them; and he often has a button of pearl shell in the point of his nose. A chief will fasten a big round pearl shell to his forehead—that's a regular coat-of-arms. The canoes, too, will be inlaid—prow, gunwale, and stern—with mother-of-pearl. In fact, we found some excellent beds we'd have missed, just by noticing these fine shells and investigating as to where they came from. Thanks to our vaudeville stunt of song and dance and our habit of living in native ways, we always got along with these people; but that's one place where I'd watch my step even now.

Presently we worked on east to the Santa Cruz group, which is under the same British protectorate as the Solomons and has much of the same strain of natives, except in a few islands where there are remnants of almost pure Polynesians. Looking back at it,

and comparing our experiences there with Sikiana, it is interesting to see how different our own attitude was, owing to the completely different nature of the people. We were hardly grown up, capable of taking care of ourselves as we were; we enjoyed a reckless lark as much as any college boy; and we were just as ready to play any sort of trick on people whose ways displeased us.

Before we had so much as set foot on Nitendi (Santa Cruz), we could see it was one of these "hop, skip and jump" places. The natives were just ugly, hating any stranger the moment they saw him. It's only fair to say that a century ago they were treated abominably by brutal captains, engaged in kidnapping labour; and the murder of a British commodore in 1875, and a missionary bishop on Nukapu four years later, were undoubtedly due to the bitterness at these man-hunting raids by conscienceless whites. Whatever the cause, their feeling was clear as a "Keep-off-the-grass" sign. Still, we were not afraid of anything now; we had our revolvers in any final emergency, and we considered ourselves equal to any crowd of natives, either at diplomacy or fighting. As we had learned, the very fact of not being afraid nearly eliminated all chance of having to fight.

So we started in with our canoes. The crowds along shore looked so threatening and began to work themselves up so with war chanteys that we decided not to take a chance: instead of landing there we paddled down the shore.

They began to run along parallel with our course,

yelling and brandishing spears; but when we kept on without paying any attention, they grew tired of that and turned back. We swung along, watching each beach as we passed. Finally we came to a place where there seemed to be an ordinary dance going on.

"Nothing here but a lot of trouble," said Jack.

"No, no," I said. "Grama and I can handle the ugly beggars. Let's go."

In to the beach we paddled.

I tell you there was a sensation among those fuzzy-heads when we hauled out the machine and started that music! It was far more wonderful to them than an aëroplane or a steamer or a motor car (the last they call "steamer-belong-bush") ; because here was a man's voice, something they knew all about, coming out of a little box. There had to be somebody inside; and they went through that same business of crawling round it on all fours to make out where this concealed singer could be. By the time we had given the chief men a small drink apiece they were almost friendly, out of excited curiosity alone.

We danced and sang and talked quite a long while. Then the boys, having made friends with several of the girls, suggested these should come out to the boat. The girls were more than willing and started down the beach.

Before they got halfway, however, the whole crowd poured after us, led by a hideous, wrinkled old woman. She was talking a mile a minute, stirring up the men, who were muttering and looking angry and handling their spears.

It looked bad for a few moments. Then the old hag grabbed these girls, drove them back, and shut them up in one of the huts.

I wasn't much interested in them, to tell the truth. When things had quieted down and darkness had fallen, I was sitting by the big fire where most of the men were gathered.

All at once I heard Mexican Jack hiss behind me, so I moved back into the shadow.

"We better clear out pretty soon," he whispered.

"Why, what's up?"

"I fixed that old she-devil that made such a fuss."

"Fixed her? How?"

"Brought a can of red paint from the boat. Ro and I went back to her hut and poured the whole bloody tinful into her sleeping mat. We better hit the breeze before the fireworks start."

We bade the men good-night and pretended we were off to our lugger. Instead of going there, though, we turned back, stole up close enough to watch, and each climbed into a tree.

The old trouble maker had gone to her hut. We clung tight and waited. Before long she appeared again, walked right up to the fire, and turned about as if to warm her back. We almost exploded as we saw that she was smeared all over with this violent red paint.

Evidently some queer sensation penetrated through her tough hide. She twisted about to examine herself—and saw the gleam of the flames on this crimson splotch all over her!

I never heard any other human being scream as she did. Jack laughed so that he fell out of his tree.

When she heard this laughter she gave another sort of yell. The whole village began to rush out of the huts, and we had just about time to leg it for the beach at top speed, leap into the canoes, and paddle off as hard as we could drive—with spears falling all about us.

The minute we hit the deck of the lugger, it was hoist sail and away, for those black fellows had dashed to their canoes and they were coming along at an incredible rate. But for the lucky chance that there was a nice breeze blowing, we'd have been in a nasty corner, had to kill a lot of them, possibly have been wiped out ourselves. It was silly kid stuff, but we thought it a huge joke then.

Those Santa Cruz spears are nothing to get gay with, either. They're long, made of very hard wood, and are poisoned at the tip with some vegetable venom which they cook up and ferment. I've tried throwing them myself: I could hit fairly well up to fifty feet; a native could use one accurately at a hundred feet. Moreover, they hurl them with force enough to drive them right through a man's body. For close work they use a sort of sword or club, with an edged flint, or shark's teeth, or something of the sort.

"Shell money" is still just as standard in many islands as wampum was among the North American Indians down to the Eighteenth Century. (Many colonial enactments legalized wampum at definite

standards: thus, Massachusetts in 1640 adopted the Connecticut standard valuing four white wampum beads—made from whelk shells—at one penny, "and bleuse as two a penny," the "bleuse" being ground down from quahaug, or hard clam, shells.)

Several varieties of smaller shells are used in the South Seas; and if anybody should think the economic question of easy money must be solved where one can make one's own, he need merely start in to manufacture one "string" to be undeceived. There are lots of easier ways of "making money." Traders have fussed with it; the Germans attempted to apply their mechanized efficiency to its production; it always cost more to get a fine grade than the stuff was worth.

To be sure, one string (approximately a yard in length) is worth one pound ten shillings (nearly $7.50). But these tiny shells, perhaps an eighth to a quarter of an inch in diameter, have to undergo a long, patient grinding till they're perfectly round, and then a slow polishing against stone; finally a minute hole is pierced through the centre and they are strung. The colours vary, some of the finest being a deep red.

These strings of shells are really an art product. They have always been used as decorations, often necklace style, and a proud owner of choice ones will carry them in a fibre bag, tied about his waist, and display his wealth quite like a naïf Westerner. Though each kind is good only in the particular island where it was made, traders accept them readily, be-

SOLO DANCING

cause they are standard currency in buying anything else on that island.

Among the natives the chief use is in the purchase of a wife. The usual price of a wife is ten or twelve strings, say fifty to a hundred dollars: such a sum in money represents a year's work for some white man, and that's a large price for a native, who has precisely the opposite idea from ourselves in the matter of there being any virtue in work for its own sake. Where a living comes so easily and wants are natural and few, labour is a curse, but one largely escapable by inertia.

Even in marriage the payment is an investment rather than an expense; on most islands, after a man has procured a wife by his year's toil, he draws heavy dividends: from then on the woman does the necessary work of existence, while he spends most of his time in smoking and talking and occasional fishing. There was rarely any difficulty for us in getting whatever information a man had about beds of shell.

There were many false trails and disappointments in that constant hunt for pearl beds. We would make for some island where a promising tale had sent us, and sometimes spend a month in searching, without finding a single trace. Or there'd be just enough to keep us on tenterhooks, diving and drifting and looking—until it petered out instead of leading us to the big virgin bed which is the pearler's constant dream.

Fortunately, this never discouraged or worried us. Rather it added a spice to the whole business. For we were continually seeing new sights and meeting

new kinds of people, and working and playing as a part of the great natural rhythms about us, instead of nervously striving to make weather and sea and savages fit in with some fussy schedule of our own.

We were living every moment of the time. We got plenty of shell and pearls to feel that something was always coming in; and we carried enough money in our belts to have the sense of entire financial independence. Some of this was in gold—added to whenever we made a sale of shell to some roving trader; I still had the £1,400 Uncle had paid me for the pearl, in English banknotes. And we were so much like four brothers that I'd have handed the whole sum and everything I had to any one of the others and gone off for any length of time necessary, knowing that it would be just the same as if I were there.

I've never known any group of men who for so long got so much pleasure out of doing all sorts of things together as did we four, who had joined forces in that impulsive, happy-go-lucky fashion. We went through hardships and dangers—that life's no pink tea—but even when things were bad for a time, I can't remember a single serious disagreement. That must have been partly because, as I say, we were not each bent on carrying out some preconceived plan of his own, but were meeting whatever came and liking it.

Nobody was even homesick, and we were all still college-boy age. To be sure, Jack and I, even Ro, had no proper homes, and no parents, while Charlie had cut loose from his Shanghai family quite thor-

oughly; but evidently we found so much in this life that we never missed all that other home side, even when we'd grow reminiscent and swap yarns of our people and early experiences.

I know that never till then had I felt so real and true, or lived such a beautiful life. I had found my place in the world. And, strange as it sounds in a frantically striving civilization, everything we wished for we got.

Before the first year of our cruise was up there was a bond between us which nothing could alter—though no one of us ever put a hint of such things into words.

At first Ro was our constant guide in dealing with new islanders, but the rest of us soon learned their ways and habits of mind, and we took great pride in our ability to go anywhere without getting into trouble.

Our music and dances made us doubly sure of a welcome. I've often wondered how those things would have sounded to another European; you have to get accustomed even to Chinese music, and we'd pieced these together from scraps more far away than that. As for myself, I completely forgot my school songs; I'd break out into some native chantey just as naturally as an islander does; and the natives, beyond any question, understood that language better than the few words we had in common. We were too active to sit still all through the frequent festivals: before long we'd be hard at one of these bally things we'd worked out together. We had plaintive love

songs—and it made no difference that we ourselves didn't understand the words—and war chanteys, and dances of every description picked up from dozens of places. We'd have the whole village around us, calling out, "Dance, dance!"

It must have been a queer sight to see me, a blond Swede, capering about in those savage dances; but we were too natural to think about that, though there were times when we'd roll on the ground with laughter at each other's antics. I did observe, however, that the blue of my eyes gave me quite an advantage with the girls: novelty has as strong an appeal to the feminine imagination there as elsewhere, and many of them had never seen blue eyes or light hair.

Of course, we struck some storms, but the little lugger was such a magnificent sea boat that we came to have the greatest confidence in getting through anything; and, as I have indicated, we planned our longer passages by the chart and the weather. Our method would be absurd on the Atlantic—I suppose the South Seas is the one place where you can work out such an adjustable schedule. I've already spoken of the well-defined hurricane belt, which must be avoided during the nor'west monsoons; outside of that you have the nor'wester and the local currents to figure on regularly. We took our time, picked our weather, fitted our plans to the conditions—hence the smooth sailing we had for the great majority of the time.

Our work of diving for pearls was the constant

factor which never changed; but there were hundreds of beds, and more possibilities to be explored, and it was always practicable to make this path of least resistance carry us to some spot worth investigating. I once heard a highbrow, mystical sort of chap talking stuff which was mostly over my head, but he spoke repeatedly of the "rhythm of the universe"; somehow, I felt we were keeping time to that. It's a great recipe for avoiding the fret that frazzles so many lives, if one can follow it. We had no ambition whatever to develop the more routine kind of business of the local pearl fisherman, who stays in one place and fishes that thoroughly—and then has to lay up for half the year.

Ro often told us fresh tales he'd recalled of those wandering Areoi among his Tahitian islanders.

"You know," said he one day, after we'd been singing and dancing at a big festival ashore, "what we do, just same what they did."

I knew more about the Vikings, and he was never tired of hearing of those long galleys and their raids. We still called ourselves the Pearl Vikings, and at times we'd plan big ideas for the future, a whole fleet of boats with an association of working adventurers like ourselves. It was rather extraordinary that in all that time we never met another pearler, or white man ashore, who seemed exactly the type to fit into such an informal company: they either lacked guts, or they had a brutal attitude toward the natives, or they were thinking of dollars to the exclusion of everything else. They didn't belong to us. Yet I am

convinced to-day that I see how to make that dream a practical, working reality.

I don't mean to settle down on an island, and build houses, and live like a lot of peasants or beachcombers, and get into trouble with each other; but an extension of our own experience, with just the right men doing the kind of work and living the kind of life that expresses their qualities. Out in the open it's possible: you can have quietness or anything you want. And there is no end to it.

A first requisite, as I have explained, is the ability to hold on to the idea of fishing for pearls, yet to relax in other ways so that one lives with the ease of the native. That is in another dimension from the life of most white men in those parts.

I didn't, for instance, go to a hotel, meet people of my own sort, and then stroll around a town or village looking at the natives as one looks at strange animals in cages. I lived their life.

We were continually on the move, yet rarely planning anything ahead. We never slept more than six or seven hours, and it wasn't in us to lie out on the sea and booze or play cards indefinitely. When work was done we'd see some tree tops over yonder, or spot a village—and it would be, "Let's go over there."

To-morrow never bothered us. There was nothing to worry about. There was no stimulus to rush here and there till one is rushing for the sake of rushing. In fact, in our work as well as with the natives, we discovered that hurry got us nowhere. We'd find a trace of shell, and for a while we would not be able

to locate the bed. Over and over, if we just kept at it easily, not with any grim determination, but just because it was exciting and there was plenty of time —by God, all of a sudden we'd stumble over good shell. So we lost nothing, even financially, by taking it easy; and all the time we were storing up good assets of experience, while our expenses were almost nothing.

Fish were there for the catching; fruits and chickens and occasional pigs were to be had cheap ashore; we had plenty of flour aboard, and since we preferred that to breadfruit, Charlie was kept busy at baking. It may sound absurd, but I'd know without meeting them that the planters and traders down there who live on canned goods simply couldn't feel as we did. Many of those fellows get so let-down and lazy that their idea becomes to loll about the house, and, when they're hungry, reach for a can opener. They still hold themselves superior. They never dream of going out in a canoe. They're in the islands but not of them.

I heard many a pearler or trader cursing the mosquitoes as a pest. We simply didn't stop where there were mosquitoes. We slept on board—that's where a pearler belongs: shore is for amusement—but we could always pick out a spot around some point where the breeze would blow the mosquitoes away. We broke many of the rules: over and over we'd all go off ashore leaving the lugger with not a soul on board. The best proof that we knew when this was safe is that no accident ever happened.

To many people it might be a hardship to be so cut off from the outside world of civilization. We never saw a newspaper. There was no mail for us even when we came to settlements. The traders to whom we sold shell might occasionally tell us of the more important happenings back in Europe and America. But all that concerned us very little. We did not seem to miss anything of that sort in the active fullness of what we had. I was to learn later to what an unbelievable extent this wiped my mind clean of all my childhood associations, even the very language I had used till I was fourteen.

To tell the truth, the few white men we did necessarily run into—mostly traders, pearlers, recruiters, and missionaries—did not measure up any too well alongside of our native friends. They'd get my hackles up right away from their statements about things of which they were ridiculously ignorant.

"Where are you going?"

"Oh, down so-and-so way."

"Don't do that; they're a dirty lot of scoundrels down there."

That, from a fellow often engaged in cheating people I knew and liked, or in the rather questionable business of "recruiting" labour! Their favourite sport seemed to be what an Australian calls "skiteing."

I expect my pride was hurt, too, by their superior airs toward a youngster whom they evidently considered a sort of floating tramp. I'd often have to feel my money-belt to avoid pulling it out and brag-

ging that I had more cash than most of them could show.

There were decent ones, of course. But that life on the little lonely islands is about the severest test of character I know. Not one man in a hundred comes through successfully.

Here is a poor devil, cut off from his own kind and with mighty little in himself to fall back on. If there is a missionary near, the two are probably bitter enemies, because their outlooks are so utterly at variance.

Such an unfortunate trader, unable to adjust himself to native ways, lives on in his same little dirty house, steadily losing whatever ambition and incentive he had at the start. He has to keep up his face before the natives, and presently that gets on his nerves; the missionary's ideas get on his nerves; he takes a native wife—and that is often the worst of all for him. He becomes slack and bitter; even his small business is just a worry; and altogether he is an unhealthy specimen.

I've known of cases where a really beautiful island girl came to civilization. A business man fell in love with her. They married—to find that she simply couldn't exist in city conditions. Eventually he sacrificed everything, cut loose from all his ties, and came out to the island to make a home there. A person who has watched can see the finish of that man from the start.

Once in a while, if he is an enthusiastic naturalist, he may develop some kind of hobby which will carry

him through. As a rule, with friends cut off, without all the stimulus he's been accustomed to, a man who's reached thirty finds it impossible to make the adjustment. He slumps. Nothing matters except stupid little things which drive him to distraction. He "goes native"—and becomes like a victim of dope. Or if he's in too lonely a place he'll be only too apt to go clean off his head. He has no place. He's a maladjusted, sick, hopeless wreck. I met enough of them to avoid the breed whenever I could.

Another type I had no use for was the rough, cursing, growling, bullying pearler or recruiter.

The big coconut plantations in certain groups require a constant supply of native labour, and some captains specialize in this work.

Such a man sails up to a likely Melanesian island and fires off a heavy gun or a small cannon. Villages for three or four miles in all directions hear this big noise. They know what the signal means.

Nothing whatever happens the first day. The recruiting captain lies in his hammock and reads a novel, or punishes the squareface. About the third or fourth day, young fellows begin to drift in. There'll be some lawless chap who's broken a tabu, or a fellow who wants to get married, or whose people need money—all those matters have been elaborately discussed in the village during this waiting interval. For one reason or another, a dozen, a score, a hundred may gather at the beach.

There are usually some natives on board making a passage to their own islands; these act as inter-

preters, through pidgin or the local tongue. As a rule the captain has an understanding with these returning workers that they shall tell the new recruits all manner of good things about the plantation he is supplying: plenty fine food, lots of women, easy bosses, everything lovely.

Pretty soon the boy has received six pounds ($30), and turned that over to his people, and is in front of a labour clerk in the cabin, coached to answer, "Yes," whenever that functionary pauses.

"You want to work for three years?"

"Yes."

"You agree to this, and that and the other?"

"Yes."

Down goes his name and he is signed up, in practical peonage for three years. The recruiter has made the same sum the boy has received for his labour—for the plantation pays him twelve pounds per head on delivery.

It's easy to see how open the system is to abuses, and I've met men in that line whom I longed to recruit, without any commission, just to give them a taste of their own medicine.

Many a time I've looked at those fellows and blessed the luck that gave me work that was a pleasure, and my beautiful little lugger, and, above all, my three partners. This realization alone would have prevented my feeling disappointed that, though we found many pearls, I never again came across one equal to that marvel which was the foundation of

my professional career. Yes indeed, I was more than satisfied.

And I continued so as we left Santa Cruz behind and swung up with the traders to the Gilberts; and then on, and on, and on, till the far-flung Island World was as familiar to us as the streets of Paris are to a Frenchman who lives and works there.

SNAKE SHELL

FLYING FISH

CHAPTER XVII

INTERLUDE IN THE AIR

FOR some years we pursued this ideal life from one group to another; adapting our leisurely movements to winds and conditions as they developed; hunting for pearl beds, diving, gathering shell, opening; singing, dancing, fishing, and canoeing with the islanders; balancing up our work and play so nicely that, in spite of the hard labour involved, the whole thing wore the aspect of an endless holiday.

Looking back to it, those dozens of months appear to telescope together: most of the events could be switched around in point of time without making

much difference. For world news did not exist for us, dates meant nothing— except in regard to the procession of altering seasons and the yearly cycle of changes in the behaviour of sea creatures.

During the entire period I can recall not a single case of real friction among our group on the lugger. At the end of a thousand days of this closest association, we had just as much satisfaction in each other's company, and life was just as keen in our joint experiences as at the beginning. In fact, the danger and the fun we had shared so plentifully made an ever stronger bond.

But, somehow, the idea arose eventually that it was time for each of us to take an individual vacation. I don't know who first suggested it: it did not seem particularly important, and we all agreed, just as we agreed to almost anything proposed. After all, diving is an exacting business, straining to body and mind; we had quite a little stake in pearls and money saved up—and in your early twenties you like to test the power that gives you in civilization; moreover, it seemed worth while to try a larger boat, with an engine, to make us independent of calms and currents. With one thing and another, the notion was born, took form, grew up, was there amongst us—and we laid our course by it, just as we would have by the nor'west monsoon.

We decided to work back to Macassar and sell the lugger there. Then each man would start off to look for any diversion that appealed to him. Since I was going to Australia, it was arranged that each of the

three would cable or write me at a permanent address in Sydney by a certain date, telling me just where I could pick up each one for the start of our next cruise.

So it was. There wasn't any ceremony or wrench at parting: we knew we'd be together again before long, ready to plunge once more into this life which suited us so well. We separated gaily, full of anticipations.

I was presently to discover that life doesn't permit a man to plot it out so exactly in advance, as a navigator lays out his course on the chart. Perhaps if it were that way it would lose some of its rich variety. Yet one is able to reach those philosophical conclusions only long after the event.

I was anything but a philosopher when I hit Sydney.

Here I was, at the age when boys are graduating from college, in a great city, after years on the wild fringes, with cash that seemed inexhaustible, under the special patronage of Fortune herself. I knew some people there to start with, and I enlarged my circle of acquaintances every day. I was feeling my oats. Why should I worry about a few miserable pounds when there was that vast submarine mine waiting to be worked? I bought anything I took a fancy to, loaned and gave away money, "lived the life of Reilly."

It tasted good. Yet the fact was that I soon began to miss something. I've learned since then to live part of the time in the city, but for me that absolutely

has to be balanced by a much larger portion of the other freer, open existence. As the weeks slid by, I found myself looking forward more and more eagerly to the reunion with my three friends, and to setting forth once more for the islands.

The appointed day came. There was no letter for me, no cable.

Well, that was nothing. We'd never worked by exact schedule. To-morrow, or soon, they'd surely report. There was nothing I could do anyhow but wait. It was bound to be all right.

However, as the morrow and then the next day failed to bring any word, I was beset by a vague worry. Instinctively I quickened my pace in the effort to blot out this insistent and painful doubt: I spent money recklessly—anything to avoid worrying about this apprehension which was growing to a fear, before which I was utterly helpless, since I had no idea even of the continent on which any one of my three partners was.

The days strung out into weeks. The weeks lengthened to months. Silence, entire and baffling. Not a clue to work on. It was just as if the ocean had gulfed them down. And I was sitting there, doing nothing except throw away hard-earned money. It was horrible.

I might as well say right here that in the more than fifteen years from then till now I've never found them, never discovered the least explanation of what went wrong. Knowing them so well, I feel it's impossible they could all have met with accidents

or lost the address. (Utterly impossible that they did not want to renew our association.) I can only suppose some failure in the postal or telegraph service, combining with some unexpected chain of events at their end—one of those humiliating, inexplicable trivialities by which life sometimes will change a man's whole existence, as if to remind him of his insignificance. But it was over. I have made effort after effort, asked and searched: not a trace of any one of the three have I found.

I will confess that one of the main impelling reasons for publishing this narrative has been the notion that it might by chance bring me word of these friends to whom the volume is dedicated. They were too large a part of my life not to hope at least for some such future shuffling of events.

This unimagined disaster affected me profoundly. It seemed to break my life right off. I couldn't make any plans. I hardly dared go anywhere for fear the delayed message would arrive in my absence. I seemed caught in an invisible net, unable to do anything but chafe my mind against the meshes. And I got in a bad way, mentally and physically—which wasn't helped by waking up to the fact that my capital was running low.

My efforts to forget this trouble constantly increased the money leak. Then, as a climax, I became ill.

After two or three months in the hospital I came out into the sunlight again, weak and discouraged and stony broke.

My pride wouldn't let me go to any of the friends of my prosperous time. I felt I had suddenly sunk into that hideous underworld of great cities, which is as savage and infinitely more disgusting than the ravenous animal world of sea and jungle. When I found myself bumming old papers at the newspaper office to use as bedding while I slept in the grottoes of Hyde Park, among tramps, murderers, fakers, all that incredible human sediment—I realized that once more I had bumped against bottom and had to work up again. If I had merely been without money, I could undoubtedly have found somebody to stake me on another pearling expedition; I knew that job, and the shell made it a sure thing. But my mental perplexity, and the illness, and a sort of sentimental revulsion for a time against any poor imitation of what had been perfect—all combined to prevent that idea from becoming operative.

I used to walk the streets, hungry and wretched, watching carpenters and blacksmiths busily working; and I kept wondering, "How am I going to get out of this?"

The only possibility which seemed to lodge in my mind was a notion of working my way back to the islands, on the chance of picking up the trail of one of my partners. Much as I hated the thought of going before the mast again, my desperation had produced the resolve to look up the vessels bound out that way, when one day I saw a couple of men working on a high stack 'way up in the air.

I watched them curiously. Some hours later I met

them in the street. They were young, nice, vigorous chaps, and I fell to talking with them.

"What kind of a bally job is that you're doing up there?" I asked the older one.

"We're high workers, steeplejacks," he said. "We come out from England to repair steeples and tall factory chimneys."

"That's damned funny," said I. "You go off the earth up into the air to make a living, and I go off it down into the ocean."

"How's that? What's your job?"

"I'm a pearl diver."

That interested them, so I told them diving yarns to match their tales of air work. They took me to their home, where they lived with their father, an elderly Englishman, and we became quite friendly. I had a sailorman's handiness with palm and needle, so when they complained about the trouble of carrying their iron spikes up the ladders, I made each of them a canvas carrying-bag to hook over the shoulder, and they insisted on paying for these.

We soon fell to joking each other. The younger one looked at me:

"You talk about your diving: I bet you haven't got the cold nerve to go up on that scaffold of ours."

"That oughtn't to be so difficult," said I.

So the next morning I tried it. Those long ladders up the side of the brickwork were quite different from ship's ratlines; but I'd spent too much of my life swinging on ropes aloft, or hanging to ropes in the water, to have it bother me very much.

"Gee!" exclaimed the older, when I came down. "You take to it as if you were hatched out on top of a stack."

Well, we liked each other, and I had nothing definite in sight, so naturally I threw in with them. There was no contract: I took just what the older brother gave me.

I soon learned all they could teach me about this trade, and there was a novelty about it that appealed to me. We three went off up to Brisbane—the first time these two had ever handled contracts without their father—and did well there. I was the more satisfied to drift along in this fashion because I was still constantly expecting to get word from Ro or Jack or Charlie; I left instructions behind in Sydney so I'd get anything which arrived, or they could trace me if they came in person.

We finished up in the North and swung down to Melbourne. There we got some big contracts, real money. Everything looked fine from the financial side; we got on well together too.

Yet I discovered that I was more and more wondering, "Is this really my job? Is this what I'm ready to live for?"

These two fellow workers were nice chaps, clean and straight, both of them. But I couldn't help realizing that their whole ideal was to do a big business, make lots of money, get rich. A few years earlier they could have become something different; but now this passion for getting ahead, grabbing the power of money, was the thing which completely dominated

them. As a natural result of not getting more fun along the way, the older one began to swell up a little with importance; we were no longer three comrades: it was his business and we were assistants—and we must think of nothing but turning hundreds of pounds into thousands.

I'm sure, from his point of view, he was merely being a good business man. He simply couldn't understand it when I explained that it was time for me to move on. Leaving a flourishing business like that struck him as crazy. But I knew there was nothing for me along the lines they were bent on following; so I declined all his offers and pulled out while we were still friendly.

There was still no message at Sydney. With money in my belt, I went up to the North coast to investigate pearling possibilities there.

It was the main activity on all that coast, and there were good pearls and shell to be had. I saw, though, it would take some money to start in as a master; and, more important, the whole industry was just an industry. They had succeeded in taking all the fun and adventure out of it as completely as they have out of modern whaling. There was a mean, hard, brutal spirit running through it all, as I've mentioned before.

I gave up all thought of it and started back from Port Darwin. Evidently it would have to be Sydney, and thence to the South Seas, for me.

Before finally tackling that I stopped over in Adelaide.

I was strolling along one of the main streets, wishing I hadn't been quite so free with some of the capital I'd tossed away. There was a church there, with quite a tall steeple—the Morgan Presbyterian Church, I think it was. On account of the work I'd been doing, I was interested in steeples: I ran my eye up the height of this, thinking it would be quite a job to scale it And as my gaze reached the top—there was a big crack!

"Why, that's something I could do," I thought.

I looked the structure over carefully. It seemed to get higher and higher as I studied it. Moreover, I had never had the responsibility of putting up the ladders. Still . . . "I've seen it all done," said I to myself. "Why can't I do it?"

I made inquiries and got the name and address of the architect in charge of the building. I was nervous about going to him, because in those days I didn't know how to talk—that is, to talk to a stranger about business which interested me more than him. There's no necessity for that in pearling. I stood up before a mirror and practiced a long time—trying to look older and solemn and businesslike, and then drilling myself to say certain sentences, just like a schoolboy memorizing a lesson. Finally I got my courage working and went to this architect's office.

I started right in: "Do you know that the steeple of the Morgan Church has a crack?"

"What?" said he in amazement. "A crack?"

You see, most people never look up. They may look all around a building, but not up high.

"What do you mean, a crack?" he went on indignantly.

"I mean a big crack near the top there," I said. "And your steeple is right over a main thoroughfare. If it came smashing down, somebody would be held for manslaughter."

I had figured I ought to scare him a bit. I succeeded too—but, like many people, he showed it by getting angry.

"What do you mean by coming into my office and taking up my time with such stuff?" he demanded. I really thought he was going to kick me out, and I began to get a bit heated myself.

"Look here," I insisted, "I'm not a liar. I'm a man who repairs those things."

Of course, I had no card, nothing to show; but while I was bluffing somewhat, he was bluffing more. He was afraid. In a few minutes he had sent to the pastor, and we three were standing on the sidewalk, craning our necks, staring up.

There was a silence. I glanced at them in surprise. Then I got a shock: they were surveying me with absolutely terrible looks. I realized they couldn't see the damaged line.

A sailorman is accustomed to pick out objects at long distances; I gave one quick glance up, to be sure.

"Can't you see that big crack there?" I asked, pointing. I expect my voice shook a little, for I was nervous anyhow, and their manner was disturbing.

They weren't even looking by now—just frowning

at me as if I were some dangerous beast that needed handling.

"See here," I broke out, "if your eyesight is so bad as that, why don't you get some glasses?"

There was a jewellery store close by. The architect hesitated an instant, then stepped across and came back with a pair of field glasses.

He squinted up, adjusting the focus. In a moment his arms dropped. His face was pale.

"My God!" said he. "I wouldn't have believed it was possible."

The pastor grabbed the glasses and took a long look.

"Why, there really is a crack!" he remarked.

"Of course there is," I declared. "A bad one, too." I felt triumphant, and thought: "It isn't so hard to get along, after all."

Those two were worried, all right. They had changed their tune: now they were begging me to tell them how I'd go about the job and what it would cost—and since I didn't know that myself I was forced to be somewhat general. Finally the architect told me they would have a committee meeting and I might come to his office next day.

When I arrived, he informed me the committee had raised some money and decided to go ahead with the repairs at once. I must present a formal tender at a definite figure.

That stumped me. I had never had anything to do with the contracts, had no idea what the charge should be. But of course I said I'd go home and draw up the

tender—wondering all the time what in hell a tender was in connection with steeplejacking. I knew what it was in diving, all right.

It seemed as if this must be architect stuff. So I went out and looked around till I saw a dingy little office with an architect's sign and breezed right in.

"Can you help me draw up a tender?"

He grinned. "Shouldn't be surprised. What's it all about?"

I explained, and he pitched in: "I herewith submit my tender for the following repairs"—and then a lot of legal contract terms. When we came to the price, I confessed I didn't know what it should cost.

"That's a difficult job," said this little fellow. "You ought to get plenty, to do that right. If they had to tear the whole tower down, fancy what it would cost." He thought a moment.

I had thought I might get my nerve up to asking two hundred dollars. This chap went on: "I'd say it would be cheap at a thousand dollars."

No man opening oysters ever refused a bigger pearl than he had expected. "Put it in," said I, "and we'll try them anyhow."

Hurrying back to the church architect's office, I handed him the document. He started to read it and then looked at me in surprise:

"You do know about contracts, don't you?"

"I know about climbing steeples," said I.

Probably there was no one else in sight who even claimed to know that. And they were frightened: they'd been seeing mental pictures of that spire crash-

ing down on the passers-by. Anyhow, there was no quarrelling over the price, which I was prepared to cut in half in order to test myself. The agreement was signed in a hurry.

"Now," said the architect, "when are you going to start?"

"Yes," chimed in the pastor. "How soon? I suppose it's possible to begin to-morrow?"

"Wait a minute," said I. "Wait a minute, please. I've got to get my gear together. Give me a chance to collect what I need."

My first step was to inquire if I could borrow ladders from some of the house painters, but I found these were far too rickety for my job. Evidently I'd have to build my own ladders.

I had studied mechanical drawing a little, and always carried a drawing board in the bottom of my suitcase. Settling down in my room, I began to work out on paper just how I was going to carry out the job, and the precise construction of ladders and spikes. For several days and nights I hardly stopped to eat.

While a blacksmith was fashioning me a lot of wrought-iron spikes and some hooks, I constructed eight ladders, made a canvas carrying-bag and a life-belt with a hook, and got my ropes together.

That steeple was nearly two hundred feet high. It looked all of that as I stood at the foot of it early one morning, before anyone was around. Obviously, it was no job for a man single-handed; but my scheme worked out on paper, so I started in.

The idea is to lash a connected series of ladders

to iron spikes driven into the wall. It requires a man accustomed to working aloft.

It was comparatively simple to erect a foundation ladder and make it solid—the base about eighteen inches out, the top held a foot away from the wall by stout battens.

I climbed this, with the bag hanging at my side, containing hammer, cold chisel, spikes, and wooden wedges. Balancing on the next rung to the top, with the top one between my legs, I straightened up. In this position I reached up as high as I could work and chiselled out some mortar between brick courses, outside the left-hand line of the lower ladder; a wedge was driven into the joint; a spike went home into this, perhaps an inch and a half deep. That wouldn't be enough if the strain came direct, but I had arranged for a sideways pull when the ladder was attached.

Hooking my life-belt to this first spike, I leaned over and put another one firmly in on the other side of where the ladder was to come. A six-foot lashing was secured to each of these anchors.

Then came the hardest part. Going down, I got the second ladder on my back, lugged it up to the top of the first, worked it up into place, and tied the ends together. Catching hold of the dangling lashings, I mounted a few steps and bound ladder number 2 tight at the point between the spikes. Up farther, and more spikes and more lashings. Then repeat the whole business.

It took three quarters of a day to get those ladders

in place. Long before noon there was a crowd in the street below, watching my every motion as if I were a man from Mars. The pastor and the committee stood at the foot of the bottom ladder, getting a crick in their necks; reporters and camera men buzzed about and snapped pictures; when I would come down the crowd would surge up to the gate of the little yard to see closer; and several nice-looking girls were giggling each time I turned around.

All that was very pleasant to my vanity. I couldn't help contrasting this position, as the centre of excited interest, with my lonely walking about a few days before, not knowing a soul and wondering what I should do next. During one quieter period, I went across the street to the pub for a glass of beer; a very dignified member of the vestry came over and said, "Why, my man, you can't do that!" I merely laughed and answered, "That's what I can do best when I'm hot and thirsty."

The rest was comparatively plain sailing. But I had one awkward moment.

I rigged up a little platform around the spire, and a bos'n's chair—with a single rope, because of the great height; in this I could flip myself through the air from one side of the steeple to the other, much to the excitement of the people below.

One afternoon, about five o'clock, I was getting ready to knock off. Among the people in the street there was a pretty girl with whom I had been conducting a sort of long-range flirtation. (They can al-

ways get a man at any distance when they make up their minds to it.)

I'd just about decided I would have the nerve to speak to her when I got down, and I suppose my male vanity made me want to show off before her. Anyhow, I swung far out in the air, to circle about the steeple and land on the other side, as I had done repeatedly before. The mass of faces below stared up, breathlessly; my unknown friend was transfixed with the rest. My performance was a special show for her, and doubtless she knew it.

And just at that instant the seizing, which bound my chair's two ropes together, pulled loose!

I felt the thing give and knew in an instant what must have happened. That wouldn't have done much good save for the fact that my diving experience had taught me always to have some safety arrangement: consequently I had worked with an independent rope hanging from my platform, which I kept in a half turn about my leg.

That half turn saved me. I fetched up against my own side of the steeple with a grand bump, but I'd gotten a grip of this rope, and it didn't take long to right myself. The crowd cheered like mad, but I felt rather ashamed; when they pressed about me as I reached the ground, wanting to know if I were hurt, I made nothing of the whole incident. To add to my discomfiture, the girl had disappeared.

I repaired the crack which had brought me the job; it took nearly a month in all, for the committee decided to have other things done, to put it all into

first-class condition. I took down the upper seven or eight feet entire, lowering the brick to the street—with a tough job in the capstone—and made it all like new. Those in charge couldn't do enough for me, gave me advances of money when I needed them, and showed their satisfaction in every way. Since I had no expenses, except for one or two bricklayers on some special finishing work, and a sailor helper part of the time, I felt like a capitalist again when we settled up.

However, I used to sit up on top of that church spire and look out over Adelaide and think over my life much as I had done in my Blue Grotto. It was exciting but lonely; there was little there for me except the money. It began to seem, though, as if this might be a fairly direct road to acquiring another boat and resuming my own life as a master pearler.

Returning to Melbourne with the comforting feeling of a heavy money belt around my waist, I ran into the brothers who had initiated me. They were confirmed business getters, really well off for them, and destined to become more so. There was not a word from my partners. I decided to look New Zealand over.

I secured some contracts in Wellington and Auckland, adding to my store of capital. Then one night I was at the cinema when they showed a reel of the jute mills around Calcutta, especially at Howrah. There were about forty big factories with over half a million spindles.

The first thing I'd bought with my steeplejack

profits was a fine, modern diving gear, costing £150, cabling the money to Siebe, Gorman & Co. in London (whose apparatus is adopted by the British government) and having the suit shipped to Wellington. It was something to have the tools of my own profession again, but I was still a long way from owning my own pearling lugger.

Those huge chimneys of the Howrah mills looked like good hunting ground to me. With luck, it ought not to take too long to save enough for my purpose, and while I was impatient to get back to my real work I could see no quicker way. "Whatever goes up can go down," I said to myself. And I set out for the Indian jute mills.

Every sight brought back a flood of recollections when I reached Ceylon. I was no longer a helpless land crab. Instead of the homeless boy hanging about the captains in the hope of a free passage to the Moluccas I was now a man with two unusual professions, either of them capable of producing a good living. I held my head up and looked on this strange country with confidence as the train bore me on the long journey north to Calcutta.

Once there, like every good campaigner, I began by mapping my objectives. Hiring a rickshaw, I would ride out to the top of a high hill, where, with field glasses, I would spot as many tall stacks as possible and mark their positions with dots on a pocket map.

Off I would go to the nearest. As I'd circle about, staring up at the chimney, the watchmen would be

like a lot of barking dogs, suspicious but not knowing what to do. About half the time I'd find something wrong. Then I'd ask for the manager.

By this time I'd practised so much in front of the mirror, rehearsing my opening speeches, that I had my attack well in hand. I was most solemn about it, for I was very sensitive about my youth still. I was about twenty-two, and the surest way to insult me was to crack a joke about my being too young to run a business of my own.

I'd open up with a shot right to centre:

"Do you know that the top of your stack is very loose? Have you seen that bad crack on the south side about ten feet below the copestone?"

That would always bring results:

"What! What! Where are you from? Who are you? Did anybody send for you?"

"No. I'm a contractor. I'm a specialist in this line."

I found the first essential was to get a man to come out of his office. No matter how busy he was, that must be done. If I could once succeed in landing the manager or his engineer out there in front of the stack, and then show him the crack before his eyes, my job of salesmanship was completed. For I had so nearly a monopoly, and the danger of accidents and damages was so evident, that price rarely had to be bargained over.

I was a sensation among native workers and English bosses when I started to climb one of these things. The latter were not accustomed to see a white man do such work in that climate. Most of the "clarks" went

about in solar topees and white suits and spoke with a strong English accent after they'd been out a few months; and here was I, in overalls and a white helmet, handling a hammer and chisel up there in the full sunlight, and sweating over these bally ladders. I was as good as a vaudeville show to that crowd.

The story of this wild white climber went up and down the river, among the Scotch and English mills. I had all the jobs I could handle, and made money fast. But although I inquired about the Ceylon pearl beds and tried to look ahead, I was lonely.

To make that much worse, I'd met a girl in New Zealand. And somehow I couldn't forget about her. That got on my mind so that I finally cabled her to come. We were married. Contracts came in so fast, I had quite a waiting list. My capital grew and grew till I counted it in thousands of pounds. Toward the end of the year my son was born. I became a Mason. It looked as if life had had its own way with me instead of my way.

With a family, a man can't resist the argument that he ought to settle down. That meant a farm, according to my wife's ideas. I remembered how kind the Boers had been in Cape Colony when I was a runaway sailor on the tramp. With the three-months-old boy we sailed for Delagoa Bay.

The first thing I knew I was the owner of a ranch sixty miles from Johannesburg, in the well-cultivated Standerton district—800 acres, several span of oxen, three- and four-furrow ploughs, a completely furnished house, and the whole encampment of Kafir la-

bourers. The former owner had merely stepped out, with £2,000 of my savings, and we stepped in, to raise cattle and Kafir corn.

Probably my fitness for that position is best indicated by the fact that, as I had driven about with a Boer guide, looking over different properties, I asked this fellow, "How does growing corn look, anyhow?" and he answered, "Almighty! Can't you see it all about you?"

Just the same, this was I, but lately master pearler and South Sea rover—now husband, father, farmer, mounted on a horse with a big stock whip in my hand, bossing a gang of workers, each man of whom knew ten times as much as I did about what he was doing.

FROG FISH

CHAPTER XVIII

A CHILDHOOD MEMORY AT NEED

IT MUST have been in the spring of 1914 that we were dropped into this ready-made shell of a Transvaal farmer's existence.

All my neighbours were Boers of the old stock; among them was Christian de Wet, who had been such a thorn in the side of British generals from 1899 to 1902. The very name of Standerton commemorated the farm of old Adrian Stander who fought against the English in 1848. They were, practically without exception, irreconcilables, preserving that ancient stubborn opposition of the Dutch trekkers to

the invading Uitlander, utterly convinced of the injustice of the annexation. It was none of my quarrel, but as men I liked these powerful, stiff, self-reliant folk too well not to sympathize with their dogged prejudices.

Their advice, too, was invaluable to a novice like myself, for I had to depend on my manager for everything: he was the one, not I, who knew what to grow, and how to grow it, and how to sell. I could boss a gang of Kafirs, but while doing so I was really acting as my manager's foreman: it was his brain that was directing operations. I saw I would have to learn many things.

Along came July, 1914. Europe went insane and every other continent was shaken by her convulsions. Even in this isolated self-contained community on the high veldt, the reaction was immediate. One after another my nearest neighbours began to drop in at my house, unobtrusively, generally in the night:

"I am called away. Will you take care of my farm for a while?"

And they would disappear, to join that early uprising which I suppose the Germans had fomented.

So I not only had my own eight hundred acres on which to display my ignorance, but I was hopping over fences and pretending to run some thousands belonging to other people. There was novelty and quite a bit of excitement in it.

However, one evening, after a day of this routine, I was sitting at home. I found myself strangely nervous:

I was up and around half a dozen times, couldn't sit still on a chair.

"What the hell is the matter with me?" I wondered.

Finally, about nine o'clock, I went out. It was a beautiful early summer night on the high veldt. (Summer is from October to April there, and the five-thousand-foot elevation makes a dry, bracing air.) The moon filled the whole world with light.

I walked up and down in front of the little house. Something was wrong inside me.

All at once I discovered what was the matter. "This damned place isn't my place!" I declared aloud.

I strode back, opened the door and sang out:

"Come on. We're catching the train for Durban."

Durban, down on the coast in Natal, was about a twenty-four hour run on the railroad. We were a good many miles from the station.

We threw things into some bags. The Kafir boys were routed out. I put the child in front of me on the saddle—and we just caught the train. I never saw that farm again. And I never needed any further proof that I was not cut out for a farmer.

When we came to the station in Durban I sent my wife and child to the hotel. I got right into a rickshaw and told the Zulu runner to beat it for the beach.

As I stepped down on that sand, and saw the easy surf creaming in, and sniffed the salt night-breeze, I knew! I was myself again. No doubt about it: the sea was in my blood, not to be gotten rid of.

I had stored my diving gear in Durban. It was like meeting a long-lost friend to get it out again. A man

who's built for one special thing seems to lose all significance in his own eyes if he lets himself be switched off to something else.

Hearing rumours of pearl shell farther along the coast, I decided to make an exploring trip up toward Portuguese East. There were tales, also, of a wreck up there with a fortune on board: I started out, sure I'd either salvage that or find some virgin beds of shell.

I had a grand vacation in Zululand, scouting on this treasure hunt, shooting big game, catching sharks and octopi when it was too rough to dive, revelling in the old active but easy outdoor life. Both wreck and pearls turned out to be merely a pair of those stories, so far as that particular region was concerned.

In the midst of my enjoyment I picked up a bad case of fever. They got me back to the hospital in Durban. For twelve days I was unconscious, on the very point of death.

When I woke, my first sight was that of my new daughter.

As soon as I was convalescent, I bought a motor car and spent most of my time driving around, investigating the seashore resorts, looking everything over, clean down to Cape Town.

Here some long-delayed mail caught up with me. The most important letter contained an imposing official Notice to the effect that, owing to the war, every alien in South Africa must get a certificate from his consul and register his name with the authorities. The final date for this was almost on me. The penalty

for failure to comply was confinement in an internment camp.

That was no joke, that internment camp idea. I knew what those things would be in that country. And to a man like myself any sort of imprisonment is a little worse than death. I made a bee line for the Swedish consul in Cape Town.

On my way, one matter was secretly worrying me. Happening to overhear some Swedes talking in Durban, I had been taken aback to find that I couldn't understand a word of what they were saying. I had utterly forgotten my native language! That seemed so fundamental that one night I invited the skippers from two Swedish vessels to dinner. They couldn't understand why all through the meal I insisted on their talking Swedish; but they humoured me—and, to my chagrin, it was exactly like listening to a pair of foreigners. I wondered if my mind had gone or what had befallen me; one or two friends whom I consulted laughed at my tale: "That's absurd," they declared. "A man doesn't forget his mother tongue."

It didn't take any great foresight now to see that this queer chance was liable to complicate a situation which was none too good anyhow. I had no birth certificate; I'd run away from one ship after another; what few identifying papers I'd possessed had been lost, while swimming, or during my years of knocking about. I myself knew who and what I was, but just how was I going to prove the facts to anybody else? Never before, in those free days of unquestioned travelling, had I needed to call on any official.

I was a thoughtful and troubled Swede as I walked into the consul's office.

He was a dignified, gray-haired aristocrat, the senior consul of his country in all South Africa. I told him what I had come for—in English.

He answered in Swedish. His face grew stern when he saw I didn't understand what he said.

Again I started to explain. He turned sideways at his desk and bent his brows at me:

"Why do you come to this consulate?"

"This passport——" I began.

"How do you expect me to give you a passport when you don't even understand the Swedish language? Have you any papers?"

"No, sir."

"Where is your birth certificate?"

"I lost it."

"When did you leave Sweden?"

"It must have been when I was fourteen."

"See here, my man," he said impatiently. "There is a whole line of people out there waiting to see me. It is for many of them the last call. Do you think I have time to waste with such nonsense?"

"But I'm telling you the exact truth."

"Truth!" He jumped up excitedly and began to walk up and down. "A fellow who declares he did not leave his native land until he was fourteen years of age, and nine years later he does not know a word of that language! You should be ashamed to take up an official's time with such a tale."

I was getting nervous myself. "See here, Mr. Con-

sul," I said. "You are paid by the Swedish government to take care of its citizens abroad. I am a Swede. Though I have lost my language, I've never been willing to become a citizen of any other country. You must listen to my story, for it's true. And if I don't report to the authorities by to-morrow they'll intern me."

He sat down again, and I repeated my statement. If I hadn't known, I doubt if I'd have believed it myself. That he didn't was only too clear.

"Where were you born?" he asked crisply.

"Bollnäs."

"And you lived at——?"

"Ockelbo."

"Father dead, mother dead, stepmother dead, brother lost in the wilds of America. Too convenient. What is the married name of this half-sister whose husband was appointed your guardian?"

His fine, cultured, diplomat's face was highly undiplomatic as he glared at me with this question. And, believe it or not, I couldn't recall that name! He almost exploded again as I hemmed and hawed.

"Incredible!" he muttered. "Quite, quite incredible. In thirty years of service never have I come upon such impudence. You are hardly sure of the names of your own brothers and sisters! You are not a halfwit: are those the only names you can recall?"

"I'm afraid so," I admitted, feeling like a cur dog being kicked.

"Didn't you have playmates? Good heavens! A boy

has playmates, hasn't he? Don't you remember the names of any of the boys you went with?"

"Wait a second," said I eagerly. "Yes, my best friend; I must have his name somewhere. Just wait a second."

He sat there, frowning and perplexed. All of a sudden that name came to me.

"Bror Olsen!" I said.

"Hmm. Bror Olsen. What did his father do?"

"He was a butcher."

"And just where was this?"

"In Ockelbo."

He reached for a big directory and began to turn the leaves. "Ummh. Ockelbo. Ummh. Well, yes; 'Olsen, butcher.' But, gracious heavens! You couldn't pick out a village in all Sweden where there was not a butcher named Olsen. That proves just nothing. No, no. As an intelligent human being I am forced to say this whole story is simply beyond belief. I can do nothing for you until you produce the proper documents. Why, not even a birth certificate!"

"But, Consul—I have money in my pocket. You cable and check up what I've told you, and I'll pay all the expenses."

"Nonsense, nonsense. A busy man, at such a time as this, has not got time for that sort of thing. Besides, there would have to be investigation. Who ever heard of cabling for a man's birth certificate!"

He became more and more fidgety because of the crowd of people waiting outside to be attended to; he wanted to put me out, but I was so stubborn in

my attitude that he didn't like to force matters. There was a big map of Sweden on the wall.

Suddenly he shot at me:

"You say you lived at Ockelbo. Point it out on the map."

I walked over and put my finger right on the spot: "There."

"Proves nothing," he repeated testily. "You went to school: tell the names of those rivers there."

"Oster Dal and Vester Dal below there; Angerman, Ume, Skellefte on beyond."

"Proves nothing, just nothing at all." He was now shepherding me out of his private office, paying no attention to my expostulations.

We reached the door. I was becoming desperate: I set myself in the doorway like a baulky horse.

"Wait a minute, Consul," I begged. "Wait a minute, please. I must have my certificate from you. To-morrow morning I must report; if I don't, I'll be interned like any jailbird. So far I've kept out of prison through all my hard times. I'm in a terrible situation. You can't go back on a fellow countryman that way."

"Fellow countryman?" said he, raising his brows. "That's the question."

"I am a Swede," I declared. "Nobody in the world can change that."

"God in heaven!" he exclaimed. "Have you no common sense, man? Can't you understand——"

He stopped short. I was holding my hand up, looking off dreamily over his head. The fact was that for

several minutes some deep part of my mind had been struggling with an idea: there was some verse I remembered from my earliest childhood. It was back there ready to come out the instant my memory could be prompted by the opening word. But that lost first word! What on earth was it? That was the thing a portion of my brain had been frantically searching for, while I was talking against time. Now this distressed diplomat's exclamation had given it to me: "God." Yes! I had it.

With the air of a little child saying his evening prayer I began:

"Gud som haver barnen Kär——"

The consul jumped as if I'd tossed a bomb at him.

"What, *what!*" he almost shouted. "What was that you said?"

I repeated it:

"Gud som haver barnen Kär,
*Se till mig som liten är."**

"My God!" he almost whispered. "Come back here." He took his former chair at his desk: "Say it again."

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*Every Swedish child learns this verse, exactly analogous to "Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild":

Gud som haver barnen kär,	God who lovest children all,
se till mig som liten är.	Look to me who am so small.
Vart jag mig i världen vänder	Though I go to other lands,
star min lycka i Guds händer.	Everywhere I am in God's hands.
Lyckan kommer, lyckan gar;	Fortune comes and fortune goes;
den Gud älskar lyckan far.	He whom God loves fortune knows.

I did so. "There are some more lines," said I, "but they've gone. That was the first verse I ever learned; I suppose my mother must have taught it to me."

"Say *'Kär,'* " he ordered.

I pronounced it.

"Again—slowly."

He reached in a drawer, pulled out a form, and began to fill it in.

"You're a Swede," said he.

"I don't really believe it yet. But it's true. Most extraordinary thing I ever knew," he muttered as he wrote. "You're from the north of Sweden."

"That's what I been trying to tell you, Consul."

"Never heard of such a thing in all my years," he declared. "There's your passport. Run along, and keep out of trouble. Come to see me after we've got all this bothersome business cleared up."

So narrowly did I escape losing my official identity and spending an indefinite term among the tough characters herded into the internment camps.

I have no explanation for this extraordinary loss of my native language. A psychologist friend tells me that there must have been some "subconscious wound" from my bitter experience, which turned me away from everything that brought back those recollections. It may be. Doubtless that wandering among the islands helped to blot it all out. Anyhow, so it was.

When I went to Sweden in 1925 to demonstrate my undersea device to the naval authorities, I fancied the speech would all come back. Everybody in the

Navy Yard was interested, and the officers would talk only Swedish to me to hurry the process along. But though my two children, whom I left there to be educated, quickly learned to speak Swedish fluently, at the end of three months I had regained only a smattering—and most of that has again disappeared.

After this I had to look my future squarely in the face. I saw I must go back to the work which meant something to me. Pearls and the island existence were my life.

I suppose no woman can understand that thing in a man which drives him away from the settled conventional security which is her ideal. Probably there is something self-protective in her which refuses to acknowledge its existence: for I think the average woman is like that "jealous God" of the Hebrews: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."

However that may be, I knew it was simply mental suicide for me to try to live that other kind of life. Besides, the plain fact was that my wife and I found we were happier apart than together.

We separated.

I went back to my work under water. I soon had my own vessel again, and I discovered that Tahiti and the Paumotus were for me the choicest part of the habitable globe.

For fifteen years I have spent most of my efforts in my proper work there and in many other island

groups. I have made elaborate inquiries for my best friend, Ro; never have I come upon any trace of him.

And in between my pearling operations I have spent a great deal of time and thought upon an improved method, which may vastly extend the possibilities of my profession.

TRIGGER FISH

SEA STAR

CHAPTER XIX

TECHNIQUE OF A DIVER'S WORK

SINCE I first taught myself, in the Banda Islands, to use a diving suit, I have spent several thousand hours under water; I have employed and managed many gangs of divers, native skin divers and those using gear; and I have naturally acquired a deep professional interest in all the details of work in this most alien of the elements man has conquered.

For skill and daring under water, without the artificial aids of science, and for general knowledge of submarine life and conditions, no race can equal the Polynesians. They really should be classed as amphi-

bians, along with the seals, turtles, frogs, beavers, and other land-water creatures. The highest ambition of a Polynesian youth is to become a great and strong diver.

They start early. You don't see an island mother washing her baby: she takes it down to the beach and leaves it there with a crowd of others. It learns to splash and paddle as soon as it learns to walk. On the beach, in the shallow pools, along the reefs there are things to see and things to eat, to be picked up; if these are on the bottom it does not take long for the youngster to plunge under and satisfy his curiosity or hunger. He goes along in the canoe to spear fish; around the evening circle he hears tales of heroes who dived to vast depths and brought up great pearls. The Melanesian is rarely a first-class diver; he is as different and lacking in that adventurous spirit as he is in colour, features, and character.

A youngster who in the city would be in a kindergarten will there be gliding through the water, springing to the surface to hold up and examine something he's plucked from the bottom, trying to sneak up on a fish and catch it with his hands. A crowd of boys will have impromptu contests to see who can swim fastest or dive deepest.

Naturally they become marvellous swimmers, utterly at home in the water, able to rest there like a seal, hardly concerned if they find themselves overboard clear out of sight of land. If a canoe capsizes a native bails it out, gets back, and goes on. If he's swept off a point by a tidal wave, he keeps afloat

somehow and may come back after days. There's just no limit to their water endurance. And necessarily they have mastered that primary matter of taking in air: the white man gets tired or drowns mainly because he hasn't learned that. In skin diving, the basis of everything is to store up enough air in the lungs and hold it while under water.

When you see a lot of skin divers working from their canoes you can hear them "taking the wind" in preparation. A man gathers himself together, his face works, he gulps and groans and strains as he forces his diaphragm downward and pumps air into his lungs, like a compressor, and holds it there. I never knew a white man who had reached a real mastery of that trick—probably just because he hasn't had the years of preliminary training, and his organs and blood vessels and tissues had not had the gradual training to resist the pressure. I've tried naked diving myself, down to forty or fifty feet: the constriction and pressure are tremendous; one's nose bleeds; it is like heaven to get up into the air again.

The young skin diver's greatest danger is overstaying under water. Frequently, as a result, he collapses as he nears the surface. More than once I have seen a man come up right beside the canoe—and suddenly, just before he broke water, his limbs relaxed, his body looked as if it had a paralytic stroke, all the remaining air rushed out of his lungs; he began to sink slowly.

If there's nobody at hand to jump in and rescue him, he sinks to the bottom and drowns. But if you

leap right in, grab him, and bring him to the surface —a man weighs little in water—slide him into the canoe and get busy at once, you may save him. The method is to double him up, jackknife him, and then work his lungs, just as in resuscitating from submersion. Quickness is the main point, then persistence: it's extraordinary, if you keep at it long enough, how often you can bring a man back who seems gone.

As I say, resistance is gradually built up in these people by their natural mode of life: they progress from one depth to greater ones, they practise storing up and holding air. Always there is the incentive of imitating the older men; also those final incentives of food and of the treasured pearls.

Formerly a man would dive in and swim to the bottom. That uses up a lot of strength and wastes his little reserve of air; nowadays, he shoots down with a weight as the native pearler of Ceylon does.

Once on the bottom, a gatherer swims or crawls about, grabs the shell he can reach, tears them loose, and drops them in the basket-bag; then, leaving the filled basket to be drawn up, he springs to the surface. As he catches hold of the canoe, you can see the veins standing out on face and arms; his whole body seems to be bursting. He hangs there till his pressure becomes more normal, then comes aboard and draws in deep breaths while he rests.

I believe it would be impossible for a white man to train himself to this work unless he began as a baby like these islanders. There are trick performers

in shows who, I'm told, can stay under for three minutes. Perhaps they can—I never saw it—but just let one of them try it under the pressure of the 90-to-120-foot depths. That's quite another matter.

Three minutes seems to be the limit of the best skin divers, if they're doing any work—whether it's at forty feet or a hundred. I've always had a belief that an occasional expert might be able as a stunt to stay down five minutes, keeping perfectly quiet; but I've never seen it done. The greatest depth possible is 120 feet; a good man will send up a surprising amount of shell from that depth within the hundred and eighty seconds which must include getting to the bottom and returning to the surface.

I think the finest skin diver I've found was a chap in one of the Paumotu islets. He was about thirty, and he had an extraordinary natural gift for it: at the greatest depth he'd work for his full time, over and over, with no evidence of effort, just like some perfect machine. Like all his fellows, he was massaged with coconut oil night and morning, and his body was like a glistening bronze statue. He never seemed to be out of condition: even first-class men will not work at it if they have a touch of indigestion or a cold, or if there is too much swell on.

This fellow was exceptional in not showing the inevitable strain from that pressure. You don't see many old men diving; undoubtedly it tends to shorten life. This is far more true among the Arabs and Malays than the Polynesians; the latter goes through

even this forced effort easily and naturally; nobody can drive them to hurry or worry. Whereas the Arab or Malay is continually driven by his own greed and that of his employer; he seems afraid all the time; he is bossed by a man who has the upper hand of him: consequently the Persian Gulf is a divers' graveyard. If I had to work men that way I simply couldn't use skin divers at all. Fortunately, the Polynesian is an entirely different type, with a self-protective ease and a native independence of nature which refuses to be mechanized to coin dollars.

The bends, or caisson disease, to which any diver, clothed or naked or working in a diving bell, is subject, is due to coming from a high air pressure too suddenly to a lower one—especially if the period of highest pressure has been long. Under the pressure, air nitrogen dissolves in the blood; a sudden change liberates this in bubbles, which, in the spinal cord, may cause paralysis; in the ear labyrinth, vertigo; in the heart, stoppage of circulation; at the joints they may clog the fine blood vessels, causing the characteristic bending, cramping, and twisting.

There is a somewhat different effect on the skin diver. At 120 feet he is under a strain of nearly seventy pounds to each square inch of his body, not far from five times the normal air pressure on land. There is a resultant bursting pressure, from his straining to resist this and to retain the equalizing air in his lungs. Anyhow, paralysis ever waits to seize the reckless.

Nowadays, the island diver wears a pair of gog-

gles, which he constructs himself. They fit close to the eyes, and not only help in seeing shell, but prevent the eyes from becoming so bloodshot.

There is intense professional pride in being a noted diver. And it has a most practical basis: a good diver in the pearl islands can make more money than a chief. It is the career of careers.

The diving suit is just about a century old. Aristotle mentions, as being in use among the Greeks two thousand years earlier, a device for taking fresh air from the surface and a diving-bell arrangement; and there were various attempts in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries. But it was in 1819 that Augustus Siebe, with his "open" dress—followed in 1830 by a "closed" dress—made under-water work really practicable.

One hundred years: and while there are now automatic pumps, and better valves, and telephones, and various mechanical improvements, so far as the man inside the suit is concerned there has been no essential change. Speaking as one who has used the things till it has become second nature, who associates them with plenty of excitement and successful effort, I'm bound to add that it turns a human being into a machine, with air compressor for lungs. Every minute spent in a diving dress is under unnatural conditions.

In spite of that, after a vast amount of experience, I should say that, for a man with the necessary physique and guts, it's easier to learn to dive than to

ride a horse. (Since setting that down I've heard a much-travelled Englishman, with flying experience, make exactly the same statement about handling a plane.)

I have found it simple to send completely inexperienced islanders down to the forty-foot depth. When lying near shore I rig up the outfit near where a crowd is swimming and frolicking about. They are all eager to try it, and I can soon pick out the ones who're fitted to become pearl divers. Great care is necessary, however; their childlike faith in the white man's invention means I must watch them all the time or they'll go too deep, stay too long, come up paralyzed. I have to give the tender strict orders: "When this arrow [or the air gauge] comes here, it's your turn. When it comes to this notch, you must come up. If you disobey, you die."

My outfit now consists of two steel tanks, three feet by ten, strong enough to stand an air pressure of 125 pounds, with a 200-pound pressure gauge connected to a diving manifold, and an attachment for air hose at one end. These tanks are braced together to form a tending catamaran, while serving also as reservoirs for air storage.

The helmet has a non-return valve screwed fast, a three-foot length of hose, and a pin valve for the diver's control. Three fifty-foot sections of air-hose form the connection between pump and diver. The outlet valve is screwed and soldered fast, permitting a slight escape of air when in operation.

I hang the helmet just underneath the surface, and

turn on enough air to fill it, the excess escaping by the breastplate. The novice ducks under and thrusts his head into the helmet: he waves his hand to the tender, takes hold of the breastplate and descends,

DANCE OF MALAITA SAVAGES

say, into ten feet of water, treading water on the way and trying to keep vertical. A very little practice enables one to keep proper balance while going up and down; when on the bottom this is aided by regulating the control valve in front of the helmet: less air, and the water rises to the chin; more, and it is driven down to the breastplate.

The beginner walks around, sits down, takes off his helmet, and springs to the surface—gaining confidence when he sees how simple this is.

After some practice along these lines, he puts on

a scaphander jacket (a half suit), making an airtight joint with the breastplate by a rubber gasket. Lead weights are hung back and front, about half as heavy as those used for a full suit; a strap goes round the waist, another passes between the legs to hold the helmet down tight. He turns on the air and jumps into ten feet of water, taking enough pressure as he goes down to ease the weight on his shoulders.

The control valve is regulated to permit jumping up and down easily; by lifting a hand above the shoulder any desired amount of air is expelled through the wide sleeve of the scaphander jacket, enabling him to sink; by holding the arms down close to the sides, he rises to the surface. It is an easy system of controlling buoyancy.

Then the learner goes down ten feet deeper, stopping when there is pain in the ears. This sensation comes from the air pressure on the eardrums and the clogging of the eustachian tubes; to relieve it, the nose is pressed hard against the front of the helmet, shutting off the nostrils, the mouth closed, and the sufferer blows through the mouth passages equalizing the inside and outside pressures. If this fails, swallowing several times, or yawning, will generally ease the ache, which only manifests itself at the beginning.

He jumps about, stoops over, lies on the bottom, noting how far these motions can go without letting all the air escape through the bottom of the jacket, which would be dangerous later in deep water.

All signals should be practised on the surface until diver and attendant know them automatically. The

tender should just feel the weight of the man below from time to time to make sure he has not too much slack on the life-line; he must never hold the line too tight, since this impedes the diver's actions. About a yard slack is proper for the life-line; more is troublesome if the man below should fall into a hole—though of course the diver can rise by turning the control valve and regulating the air in the scaphander.

The pearl diver usually shakes hands and jumps in; his tender stops him with a taut line while he bounces up and regulates the control valve; when he's ready to descend all the way he raises his arm as a signal.

An extra attendant watches the air-hose, but he merely slacks it out or pulls it in as instructed by the tender. It is essential to pull in the slack before signalling, "feel" the diver, and then give distinct pulls —steady, not jerky.

Answers to signals must be given only when they are clearly understood; if there's doubt, either diver or tender should repeat until the proper answer is given. A careful tender asks his diver from time to time if all is right: if he gets no reply, he pulls him up at once. Also he watches the bubbles and follows the man's course with the canoe or catamaran.

Working divers have marks on their gauges before going down, and they take turn about in accordance with these specified marks. Measurements are marked on both air-hose and life-line, so the tender can judge the pressure needed for that depth—always keeping a safe margin of 15 pounds in the tank.

Here is a sample signal code for a pearl diver working with a scaphander half suit:

FROM DIVER

Pulls on Life-Line
One..... I am all right.
Two.....Lower away; more air-hose.
Three.....Pull up; not so much air-hose.
Four.....Haul me to the surface.
Five..... Lower me a slate [for sending up message].
Two-one..... I understand.
Two-one-Two.....Send me a basket.

When the depth marks show the diver is on bottom a single pull notes merely that fact; otherwise it means he wants to be supported by the life-line; when he wants to descend again he pulls twice.

FROM THE TENDER

Pulls on Life-Line
One..... Are you all right?
Two.....You are down full air-hose.
Three.....You must come up soon.
Four.....Come up at once.
Two-one..... I understand.
Two-one-Two.....Pull down slate or basket.

Pulls on Air-Hose
One..... Search (or remain) where you are.
Two.....Go straight ahead.
Three.....Go to the right.
Four.....Go to the left.

When the diver is ascending, one pull means stop.

One of the dangers impressed on a novice is that of smashing his helmet glass or breaking a valve

against the coral. That glass is very heavy, but it can be shattered: there has been more than one case where a diver has been buried with his helmet; the sudden emptying of air from the helmet, with that relentless pressure in deep water, gives a man the quickest death possible. He is shoved into the strong helmet so it would have to be cut off his lifeless body. That is what is known as a real "squeeze." Even a light squeeze may be fatal. But such a mischance is due to sheer carelessness.

In all my years at it I have never had a bad accident.

At sixty to a hundred feet a man can work below for an hour. Should he have to get down full-hose, to a hundred and fifty feet, in order to reach some shell, he should be brought up in fifteen or twenty minutes.

Of course, if one has a decompression tank on board, it is simple to work longer in deep water. In salvage work that is customary; in pearling we're lucky to have one on shore for saving those attacked by the bends. I have to cope with one or two cases of this each season, and it's a heartbreaking sight to see the poor devils; even those who don't die are apt to be permanently crippled—except with first-class arrangements for decompressing.

I had one slight touch of it myself—sharp pains all over. But I started in as a boy, and I've always been so determined not to get killed or crippled that I've taken pains to study out the whys and wherefores; and then I've been cautious.

Another ever-present apprehension of a southern

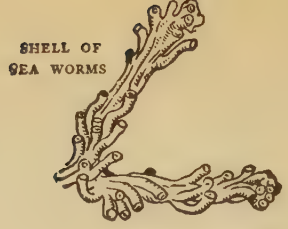
diver is to have his life-line cut or fouled by the jagged coral. The line has to be changed continually, since we use a very thin one for pearling. With constant tests of this and the air-hose, and ordinary common sense when working around sharp formations, accidents from this cause should be very rare indeed.

Octopus and shark I have mentioned already. The skin diver needs also to watch out for barracuda, and the giant moray eels, sometimes over ten feet long and armed with wicked sharp teeth.

The giant clam, too, is a trap for the unwary native. Those monsters grow to a size of three or four feet across, weighing the better part of a ton; they are heavily crusted over with sea growths, and a naked foot may slip right between the valves unawares: they clamp together with crushing force, and the luckless diver is in a bear trap at the bottom of the ocean. A man by himself grabs his big knife and tries to reach the hinge; if that fails, the one chance—a native can do it far more readily than a white man—is to hack one's leg off.

The native diver gets no wages. He is signed on at a franc or a shilling a month. His real payment is an allowance of so much on each ton of shell he fetches up. He doesn't do badly on that basis when he's working on that beautiful Macassar shell, for instance, with its gold or silver tinge, classed as prime number 1, and fetching $900 or more a ton for fancy lots. When you strike a good bed, where the live oysters run to twelve pounds apiece, an expert native rolls up a good tally.

I never begrudge them a penny of what they can make. I know only too well what their daily work means, and in point of fact I consider my men my friends. No one could ask for a nicer lot to work with than a picked crew of Polynesians.



CHAPTER XX

FISHING FOR PEARL NECKLACES

THE economic basis of our care-free years-long cruise—indeed, of practically my whole existence since I was eighteen—was the ocean-floor crop of the pearl oysters. I've harvested the ocean in many ways, but pearls have been the things which always brought me back. There is an irresistible fascination about them.

I find most city people, and all business men, look upon pearl fishing as a wild, far-away, reckless sort of gamble. The truth is, it's surer than any land crop I know about, for a man who knows how; safer than lots of businesses of which my civilized friends have given me glimpses. Really, it's more like speculating

in stocks which have a seasoned reputation and which pay a mighty good interest on the investment while you're waiting for a move.

It would not be difficult, with some capital, by systematizing operations and applying strict business principles, to build up a highly profitable standardized business whose shares would have far more valid claims for the investor than dozens of market favourites.

Why haven't I done that, then. Well, one basic reason is that in my observation "strict business" means forgetting about everything except making money. In such an enterprise it's highly immoral to consider any activity which conflicts with net profits. That's never been my idea of living. I can work long stretches, and live close or do without anything but barest necessities, for the sake of accomplishing something I want to do. I can bargain like any Arab in buying equipment or selling my pearls. But I can't make getting money a final end for a long period. I've made money; and when the time came to exchange it for what I wanted more, I've spent it. I'm not assuming any superior attitude: every man has to live according to his nature. And it's quite true that over and over I've been temporarily at the beck and call of men who had been more earnestly thrifty than I. Undoubtedly, a man's wise to build up enough capital to serve in financing his own particular needs. For me it's been more important to economize in thrift than in living to my fullest capacity. The pearl industry and I were made for each other.

Perhaps I should explain right away that it is the shell which chiefly offers the chance of standardizing pearl fishing. That and the sure product of small pearls can be approximated in advance. The big pearls —ah, that's where you leave an open door to chance. They do furnish the exciting gamble which distinguishes this business from any other.

The importance of the shell is indicated by an estimate made by Kunz and Stevenson of world production at the very time of our cruise:

LOCALITY	NUMBER OF FISHERMEN	PEARLS: LOCAL VALUE	SHELL: LOCAL VALUE
Asia			
Persian Gulf	35,000	$4,000,000	$110,000
Ceylon	18,500	1,200,000	40,000
India	1,250	100,000	95,000
Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, etc.	3,000	200,000	150,000
China, Japan, Siberia, etc.	20,000	400,000	50,000
	77,750	$5,900,000	$445,000
Europe			
British Isles	200	15,000	
Continent of Europe ...	1,000	100,000	3,000
	1,000	$115,000	$3,000
Pacific Islands			
South Sea Islands	4,500	$125,000	$500,000
Australian Coast	6,250	450,000	1,200,000
Malay Archipelago	5,000	300,000	800,000
	15,750	$875,000	$2,500,000
America			
United States Rivers ...	8,500	$650,000	$350,000
Venezuela	1,900	275,000	10,000
Mexico	1,250	210,000	200,000
Panama	400	40,000	75,000
Miscellaneous	1,000	75,000	25,000
	13,050	$1,250,000	$660,000
Grand Total	107,750	$8,140,000	$3,608,000

If you eliminate the Persian Gulf and Ceylon, where the shell (of *Margaratifera vulgaris*) is almost worthless, the world shell product is just about equal to the pearls. In the waters I know best it's worth three times as much. The master pearler who knows can always get shell: hence the steadying factor of the enterprise.

And as for being remote—perhaps it is physically remote, though that is not altogether a disadvantage, even from a business point of view. But it's not too far away to be influenced by the fashions of the West. It's a striking fact that the vast prosperity of the United States and the insistence of the American women of wealth on strings of perfect, large, exactly matched pearls have mainly directed the pearl fisher's efforts in recent years. He still considers his shell and small pearls standard; he may still get something in the Indian market for off-colour, irregular, or baroque specimens: his chief aim is to secure those rare and perfect treasures for which the demand exceeds the supply. Literally, he is fishing for pearl necklaces—ultimately costing the buyer anywhere from the $10,000 which seems an everyday matter in New York's Fifth Avenue shops, up to the string belonging to one motor magnate's wife valued at $1,500,000.

There have been plenty of theories as to the origin of the pearl. They were the tears of celestial beings; they were formed from dew dropping into the oyster's shell (from Pliny down to the Seventeenth Century

this was the standard belief); they were bones; they were the bivalve's eggs; and what not. We know now that they are simply built up, around some foreign particle as a nucleus, of the same materials of which the oyster builds its shell. This "source of irritation" which causes the deposits may be a tiny sand grain, a granule of the horny outermost layer of the shell, or some similar hard object; it seems probable that this kind of stimulation is more apt to produce irregular forms, baroques, or "blisters"; as a rule, the perfect pearl is built up about the minute larva of a parasite (a flatworm related to the liver fluke which attacks sheep). This strange worm lives in the scoter duck and produces eggs, some of which pass, living, into cockles; here one develops into a round cyst, producing larvæ, which ultimately reach pearl oysters.

And the oyster, artist as he is, constructs from his own being this marvellous sarcophagus for his parasitic visitor!

The oysters (the biologist really classes them rather with the mussels) which perform this miracle are of many species: the Ceylon (*Margaritifera vulgaris*); the largest, and producing the best mother-of-pearl, *margaritifera maxima;* the Australian "black-lip," *margaritifera; barbata* of Panama; *persica* of the Persian Gulf; *erythracensis* or "Egyptian shell"; *martensi* of the depleted Japanese reefs, now used in the production of "culture pearls"; and a number of others—not to mention the *Unio* and other fresh-water mussels of Scotland, Wales, United States, Canada and China (where for centuries they've been

cultivated: they even make pearl Buddhas by inserting little images between the shells for the mussel to work on). Even the abalone (*Haliotis*), or ear shell, the pearly nautilus, and many other mollusks have been known to produce pearls; and every now and then one hears of a plate of raw oysters in a restaurant giving up an unexpected prize.

The professional diver, however, while knowing the peculiarities of many varieties and waters, recognizes two main types: the small, seldom larger than the palm of the hand (*vulgaris*), furnishing the finest quality of pearls, and worthless as shell because the nacre is so thin; the large, weighing up to twelve pounds, yielding few pearls (though occasionally exquisite ones), and with thick mother-of-pearl, which is a standard article of commerce, going into buttons, studs, knife-handles and the like.

The true home of this remarkable mollusk-artisan, who manufactures iridescent nacre and builds pearls, is in about two hundred feet of water. There are the great beds of large oysters. I know perfectly well how opposed this statement is to the accepted notions: you will form quite another opinion if you listen to the divers who do not wish to go down deep. In the Persian Gulf, for instance, the general belief, fostered by reports of the skin divers, is that there is no shell below sixty feet. I don't blame the poor devils: go ashore at a place like the Bahrein Islands, and the biggest population in sight seems to be the burying place of dead skin divers. You run into the same thing on the South American beds, off Venezuela and

Colombia; those fishermen use diving gear, skaphander, and work down to eighteen or twenty fathoms, but they have the same story: nothing beyond that. It stands to reason that if such hired men—making a living by an arduous, dangerous trade—can get some shell at depths they can stand, they are going to pooh-pooh the notion of beds in deeper water, with that terrific pressure increasing at every fathom. If one ever does consent to make a deep plunge, he comes right up, declaring, "No shell."

Once in a long while, however, you find a natural superdiver who seems to possess an immunity from the dreaded "bends"; I've questioned such exceptional experts closely. Moreover, through a contrivance of my own, I myself have been down to 186 feet —a little deeper than the maximum stated in the books as the limit at which useful work had been done up to quite recent years. (Angel Erostarbe, a Spanish diver, is recorded as having salvaged £9,000 in silver bars from the *Skyro,* sunk in 182 feet off Cape Finisterre.) But two divers of the U.S. Navy were stated in 1915 to have reached 306 feet off Honolulu in salvaging the F-4; and in 1929 two others, in a tank at the Washington Navy Yard, reached a theoretical depth of 353 feet: that is, they withstood the pressure one would meet at that depth.

But there's been mighty little real work done below twenty-five fathoms. So I know of what I speak when I assert that the main beds of both the large and small pearl oyster are far below the average depths at which we work to-day; we've been reaching only

the outer fringes of these vast ocean-floor colonies.

There is additional confirmation of this from the odd practise in a few islands of dragging for big oysters. I've seen that only in the Dutch East Indies and the Sulus, and, for small shell, occasionally in the Caribbean and South American waters; never in Tahiti or the Paumotus, or Polynesia generally.

The native makes a hardwood prong, shaped like a claw, weights it with stones and fastens it to the end of a very long line. He gets into his canoe and drifts with the current—often asleep—dragging this thing along the bottom, frequently in four or five hundred feet of water. Once in a while the claw gets into the mouth of a big oyster, which closes on it, and the fisherman hauls up his prize.

I could never understand this, for when I approach a bed the oysters usually close up tight. They feel the vibrations when one is still some distance away. Normally the bivalve is open most of the time, making its own lazy current of water across its body with its gill hairs, and drawing food and oxygen. Its only method of defense is to shut up (like some husbands; perhaps wives, too). The mantle edge is sensitive to light, and other nerves react to various stimuli: a shadow, a change in the water, a touch, an impulse from vibrations starting a number of feet away—any of these will cause the strong muscles to close the valves tight. I've noticed repeatedly in a current that one can get much closer upstream than down before they take warning.

So it's surprising to me that this wooden prong,

dragging along the bottom, ever finds an open oyster. It does—but it's no method for an impatient man: these easy-going native fishermen may get one big oyster in a whole day, or even none. However, it certainly proves my contention that the beds do not peter out below our present working depth.

From these deep breeding beds the oysters pour out spawn, which is fertilized and borne along by currents. (The creature is bisexual: the same individual produces eggs at one time, sperm at another.) A tiny shell forms the second day, and the little transparent floating organism wanders at the will of tide and set. Observers at the Limfjord beds in Denmark declare it may travel five miles before "settling down." Finally, those which survive find some suitable hard object to which they attach themselves by curious threads, the byssus, secreted by a gland in the muscular foot. The young mollusk then becomes "spat"; it can free itself and move about and anchor again with a freshly made byssus, but its main job is to sit tight and grow by what comes to it.

I have found, once in a while, very fine, clear, large shell apparently living free in a mud bottom; as a rule the millions which fasten to loose stuff die; they need a firm, hard object to cling to, irregular masses of coral—even a flat bottom if it's hard rock. Such suitable places are called "paars" in Ceylon, and the substances forming them (corals, calcified algæ and shells), termed "culch," are sometimes built up artificially to further the growth of new beds.

My own interest is in the natural beds. New ones

are forming every season, and with the vast number of regions waiting for the world pearler, he is troubled only by the necessity of choice.

In searching for new beds one depends first of all on the natives. The men of each island know a lot about everything in that particular neighbourhood; if you understand them, and they trust you, they'll give you information which is invaluable. When an intelligent native tells you "good water," you investigate.

In addition, I keep studying the bottom as the boat moves over any clear, shallow places. I've already mentioned a smaller shell which is an excellent indication of the presence of pearl oysters; there is also a fernlike water growth, with whip-shaped "leaves," which we consider sure "sign" in the South Seas.

With some such hot trail, if possible, the diver goes down and walks about, studying everything in sight, moving to the limit of his range, drifting behind the lugger, looking for the big shell he's been dreaming of. It takes quite a lot of education on the spot to know the bally things when they're right before your eyes.

I've told of my own disconcerting experience on my first bed. Every diver goes through that: until he knows what to look for, he may be actually walking on pearl oysters and never know it. On my last trip to the Solomons I put down one native who pretended a lot but was really not an expert. It was only about fifty feet of water. He came up soon, jabbering, "No shell; no shell."

Taura, my Number One, thought this rather queer for the sign was good. He questioned this fellow, but the latter insisted, "No shell."

That made Taura angry. He turned, dived right over, and shot down: hardly had he reached bottom when he was grabbing big shell as hard as he could, ten or twelve of them, and in less than a minute he was up again, loaded so heavily that two men had to lift the basket on board. The place was full of shell. We brought up a ton within a stone's throw of that spot.

The point is that these anchored oysters become matted with seaweed, barnacles, small shells, all sorts of ocean growths; these match their backgrounds; and the details and colours and shapes vary enormously in different waters; also the oyster locks his doors as you approach. Finally, while we don't have many of those long streamers of seaweed in the South Seas, the coral formations are high and branching into grotesque shapes: you go through regular forests of the stuff, where your mind must be on your hose and life-line every minute: that adds to one's confusion. You've taken one degree as a real pearl diver when you can be dropped down anywhere and recognize at once what you're after.

The other men, sitting about this basket of shell and rubbing it into the diver who'd failed, explained that Taura was not an ordinary man—he had fish eyes!

I've dived enough to develop fish eyes myself. Pearler's eyes too. The minute I look at a bed now I have a pretty good idea of what's in it. My main

job to-day is to travel up and down over the bed before I put the divers down. I can estimate the amount it's good for, and check up on them later. While they are working it, I'm off, prospecting for another bed.

We never strip a bed; shell under five inches rarely pays for handling. It's the larger ones that have the sure value and the possible big pearls. So there's always plenty of seed left so far as the pearler is concerned. The oyster has a horde of enemies who worry him far more than man—skates, and rays, and file-fish, and boring whelks, and parasitic worms, and honeycombing sponges, and, above all, the voracious starfishes, who seem to be little disturbed by being torn in two, and who are prize oyster openers. They simply fasten to each valve and keep up a steady pull, until the oyster's closing muscle becomes fatigued; he opens, and the starfish devours him. Herdman and Hornell made a report on the fluctuating Ceylon fisheries, in which they figured that more than five million pearl oysters were killed there each year by the starfish.

The ideal bed is a scooped-out flat hole where a gentle eddy sweeps around—not necessarily showing on the surface, for between islands you get all sorts of counter currents down below. Sometimes in a hollow like that, into which the young shell sweep and settle, you might possibly find two to five hundred oysters in a forty-foot space. That would be a real pocket. The shell is usually spread all about, and fifty oysters or so from one spot is excellent. Prob-

ably the average would be the ten or fifteen big fellows that will fill one basket. That's quite an added weight for the diver: it needs a couple of men to take it off your helmet, where it's hooked to the breastplate. We use native woven baskets, not stiff, but really like a net.

After all the outfitting, recruiting, sailing, scouting, searching, gathering—we reach that tense moment when the pearl former is opened and investigated. Plenty of disappointment waiting there. One becomes thoroughly seasoned in patience before the first season is over.

For, during some dreary stretches, one can open thousands of shells without finding so much as a single seed pearl.

Again, suddenly, there is a whole bunch of these creamy granules in one oyster. These little fellows usually occur in groups, as a rule just beneath the oyster's skin, so that your finger at once presses one against another. The baroques and blisters are apt to be attached to the shell somewhere. The professional does not term them pearls. They have some value; especially in India these odd shapes have always been used for jewellery; and the Chinaman grinds them up for medicine! But they've been worth less and less since the wealthy women of the West turned thumbs down on any rough-looking pearl and began to demand greater and greater perfection of form, colour, lustre, freedom from flaws, graduating, matching. Whether it's a sphere, or an oval, or an oblong, the valuable pearl must now be a finished product. It's

an axiom in the trade that the Orient will take anything, at a price; but that for the very finest necklaces or earrings the ultimate market must be the United States. And my personal experience has been that the American woman is at once interested only in the absolute best, and is a better business woman in getting her money's worth of this superproduct than any other nationality.

(However, I've heard an Oriental tell of an English duchess whose pink pearls had long been held the finest in Great Britain. Being in India she arranged to be invited to look over a certain Maharajah's collection, secretly expecting to confound these "natives" by the sight of her own treasures. The obsequious custodian took her into a guarded chamber full of precious objects and chests. Opening one box the size of a trunk, he remarked casually: "This contains His Highness's *pink* pearls." The duchess never exhibited her own proud necklaces!)

So that is what a pearl fisherman off the savage coast of New Guinea really has in mind: the vision of one of those exquisitely graduated strings of marvellous pearls, each a picked gem, the whole representing a fortune to an ordinary man.

In many regions local pearlers who could not adapt themselves to this tyrannous demand of fashion found their former markets gone: many simply had to close down. The master pearler who survives most surely is the man who recognizes the demand, looks over his mental map of the world's grounds, gets his boat and gear, and sails away to some lonely beach at the other

end of nowhere, and works for the prize gems which are always scarcer than the demand, whose value has been mounting without any setback for generations. Possible changes of fashion cannot touch him before he knows all about them. For half the year he fishes, under these primitive conditions; during the other half he goes to Paris to sell his catch at headquarters and see the other extreme of life. For a man who feels as I do, there is no possible work the world has to offer which can compare with it.

No matter how many times you've been through it, no matter how long the luck has run against you, the excitement of opening never fails. Bucking the wheel at Monte Carlo or buying chances in the Calcutta Derby can't touch it.

I've often tried to imagine the sensations of the first man who ever opened an oyster and found a perfect pearl! (He would be a long way back, for the *Rig-Veda,* the oldest of the Hindu sacred books, written down a thousand years before Christ, refers half a dozen times to *Krisana,* which the scholars translate as pearls.) He must have thought some ocean god was performing a miracle for his special benefit.

It's enough of a miracle to-day, when the thought of the dollar value is necessarily prominent in a man's mind.

You're sitting on a box or a pile of shells, opening, opening, opening—as you've been doing for days, weeks, months. All at once, there it is disclosed before you, a Pearl in its first pristine splendour. Your

Pearl! Your trembling fingers seize it, hawklike. Your cry of exultation is a sort of hoarse whistle. A kind of delirium grips all on board.

If there is a pearling fleet, the news spreads through it as if broadcast. The other skippers come around to look at the new "baby" and its lucky finder. You stand with this indescribable drop of beauty on your palm, discussing shape, colour, lustre, weight. Yes, and price: impossible to forget the concentrated power for which that globule is exchangeable. But there is something besides, which affects even these rough, unimaginative seamen, something far beyond the sight of the equivalent in bills or gold: there is truly a mystic, supernatural quality about a flawless great pearl. Witness the legends which have clustered thick about it from time immemorial, its symbolization of chastity, the effect it's ever had on poetic fancy.

This marvel is presently popped into a humble tobacco sack, carried in a belt next to the skin. Again and again it must come out, for exhibition to rivals, for reassurance to yourself.

How many times I have contrasted this scene with that in a dealer's luxurious shop: the critical buyer at a polished table; the cool, indifferent salesman taking the gem from a safe and placing it in front of the depreciating customer!

Every little while your hand seems to feel automatically for this little pouch; you become so accustomed to the feel of the spheres that you can actually distinguish the new one by touch alone. You

gloat over its beauty like a miser over his gold. Yes, indeed, pearling has rewards besides the money profits.

Pearls are of almost every colour, the hue in general resembling the shell. (The black shell of the Paumotus and the Gulf of California are most apt to produce the new prized blacks.) The favoured colours are black, especially the rare greenish black; the pink, or rosy; and the cream. The dead whites and all the miscellaneous shades are hardly worth going after to-day.

It seems to be a fact that blacks were considered worthless in olden times; not till the Empress Eugénie made them the vogue, with the lustrous dark perfection of a pet necklace of them against her beautiful throat, did they begin to assume their present importance. Kunz tells a remarkable tale of Streeter, the famous London expert, who, in 1884, bought for £4 an antique Russian brooch. The centre of this, supposed to be hematite, proved to be a discoloured black pearl of 77 grains; this was "skinned," producing a beautiful and perfect black, ten grains lighter. He sold it to a London jeweller for £400; then hearing of a match for it in Paris, he repurchased it for £600 and made another profit by selling it to the French dealer owning its twin. The latter got £2,000 for the pair from a rich iron merchant. The same pair of pearls would probably bring nearer £10,000 now. The finest black recorded was a pear-shaped specimen of forty-nine grains, with a green sheen, "as perfect as if turned out of a lathe," shown

in Paris in 1900: this single gem brought $30,000, even at that date.

A news despatch in October, 1929, reported that a native diver in the Persian Gulf had found a pearl weighing fifty grains, "valued at £50,000 ($250,000)" —and that one of the lucky group in the boat went mad, never having imagined so much money as was coming to him for his share.

If the figure is correct, this would represent high-water mark in pearl values, for the last century anyhow.

CORAL AND SEA ALGÆ

CHAPTER XXI

TRUE PEARLS, IMITATIONS AND "CULTURES"

THERE is a very simple test for distinguishing true pearls. Every informed dealer knows it. Anybody can apply it. Yet I have never seen it in print.

Of course, the trained eye rarely needs this: one who has studied pearls closely gets a depth, a lustre, a living quality—or the lack of it—at first glance. If there is doubt, try this:

On a bright day, with good natural light, hold the globule between your eye and the light: a true pearl will show, about a sixth of the way from the

edge, an unmistakable translucent ring. The cleverest glass beads or any other imitation are opaque, without this characteristic ring.

If you want to pick out a colour to match a particular gem or string, or to compare different shades, place the pearls on a piece of white cotton in front of a window with natural light.

When considering shape and lustre, roll the pearl slowly over a piece of black velvet as you scrutinize it.

"Perfection" in a pearl implies a number of points. Whatever its shape—spherical, oval, pear shaped, drop—it should exhibit as finished a symmetry as if turned on an exact machine. It should have a good colour and "skin." There must be no spots or blemishes. (If held in dark velvet so that sunlight falls slantingly on it, first one side then another, these faults are much more discernible.) It should glow with a rich lustre, or orient, all over, not shallow or dead looking, but with depth and life.

When an ordinary pearler speaks of "big" pearls, he means anything above about five grains. If perfect, all above two or three grains are well worth while. Those are the Number Ones on the string we have constantly in mind.

The largest pearl of which we have exact facts in the West (though Tavernier records a 500-grain monster) is the egg-shaped one recorded as among the French crown jewels certainly as early as the first Napoleon: this La Régente weighed 337 grains; it was sold in 1887 and reported twenty years later as being in the possession of Prince Youssoupoff. The

authorities agree that specimens of fine lustre weighing more than a hundred grains are exceedingly rare; the trade calls these prodigies "paragons." Seed pearls are classified as those under a half grain; when they fall below one twenty-fifth, they are "dust pearls," unsuitable for ornaments.

The grain of pearl or diamond weight is only .7925 of a troy grain (a carat being approximately 4 pearl grains). With round pearls a system of measurement may be used. At the Ceylon fisheries the buyers have metal colanders with holes of varying sizes. The diameters of spherical pearls run as follows:

Weight in Grains	*Diameter in Fractions of an Inch*
1	.1307
2	.1645
3	.1889
4	.2058
5	.2225
7	.2504
10	.2815
15	.3220
20	.3547
30	.4059
40	.4468
50	.4815
60	.5118
100	.6071
200	.7641
300	.8748
400	.9630
500	1.0374

So if you measure with a pair of calipers, and your pearl is an eighth of an inch through, it is one grain

in weight; a quarter inch, seven grains; three eighths, twenty-five grains; a half inch, fifty-five grains, and so on.

It is surprising how closely one learns to estimate weights when, as in this case, the object is so absorbing that one handles it continually. Of course it is necessary finally to resort to the scales; but I find a single glance will give me an approximation of weight which is close enough for most purposes.

When it comes to the question of price, this ocean gem is so individual that its classification and valuing are matters of lifetime study. There is, however, a method in general use of figuring *after a "base value" is established,* which jewellers have followed for more than three hundred years. By this, if a one-grain pearl is worth X (the "base value"), a two-grain pearl is worth 4X; 3 grain, 9X; 5 grain, 25X; 10 grain, 100X —that is, the value is as the square of the weight in grains on the base figure.

Estimating a graduated necklace of eighty-three pearls might result, then, as follows:

1	pearl	weighing	12	grains	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	144
2	"	"	10	"	each	(each	100)	.	.	.			200
4	"	"	8	"	"	("	64)	.	.	.			256
8	"	"	7	"	"	("	49)	.	.	.			392
8	"	"	6	"	"	("	36)	.	.	.			288
10	"	"	4	"	"	("	16)	.	.	.			160
20	"	"	3	"	"	("	9)	.	.	.			180
30	"	"	2	"	"	("	4)	.	.	.			120
													1740

If your "base value" were $1 the necklace would be worth $1,740; if $20, it would appraise at $34,800.

It's almost impossible to give any idea of "base value." Colour, quality, condition, matching, special demand—all enter into it. Twenty years ago an authority reported that during that year pearls of five grains and up had been sold at bases from five to twenty dollars.

If I found a twenty-grain pearl to-morrow, perfect in lustre, free from flaws, and of one of the desired colours, a really fine specimen, I'd expect to get a minimum of $10,000 for it from a Paris dealer. It might be double that, or even more.

That, of course, is not the retail price. On large pearls we "producers" can get about two thirds of the final price to the customers; on small ones—below five to ten grains, say—we receive only one third what the retailer receives.

In the islands the native fisherman sells to a buyer ashore—generally a more or less direct representative of the dealers in the rue Lafayette. He doesn't have to hunt for his market nowadays: these field purchasers come and dig him out of his hut, they're so keen on the trail.

The price he gets is a matter of bargaining. But the old days, when a native might swap a valuable pearl for a few bottles of squareface, are gone. There are too many experts in the business now for that sort of thing: even we fellows who harvest the crop are beginning to know a little. Except for the big gems, pearl values are pretty well standardized, and a brown islander can figure these standard rates into what he wants as well as anybody else. He can count, per-

haps, on getting a fifth of the retail value in Paris or New York—a much larger proportion on big specimens, if he can hang on and wait till two or three buyers are competing.

Of course, a man may spend his whole life in fishing and yet know hardly anything about the fine points of pearls. Those precise technical details are the stock in trade of the expert dealers, the men who sit in the rue Lafayette and receive pearls from every part of the world and every species of pearl-bearing mollusk. He's at the centre and forms a world judgment.

Most of the big houses in Paris have buyers who are forever combing the islands and centres where fishermen congregate. It is commonly believed that a tight ring, dominated by one firm, controls the bulk of the pearl industry in that city, which is the world's central market for pearls. Beyond a question, this firm must have an enormous organization, for one meets its representatives in every forgotten nook of the ocean "back of beyond."

There are some Hindus, Arabs, and a few Chinese among these travelling buyers, but the mass of them are Jewish, and they're like hounds on a fresh trail. As a rule, that race isn't fond of the sea when it gets its back up; yet I have seen a Jewish buyer, with the glass dropping so that every seaman knew it spelt a hurricane, absolutely insist on going to sea—because a rival had started for a port he wanted to cover. He may have been partly ignorant of the danger, but certainly he was risking his life for the professional lure.

The Chinaman is apt to be a trader and a dealer in shell, handling his pearls only as an occasional side line. I've never seen any Americans in this work: the United States still looks to Paris for its supply. The 20 per cent. duty of the United States tariff is quite effective in maintaining that relation, since France admits pearls free.

The master pearler naturally has a wider perspective than the native diver in marketing his products. He has not progressed to the point of having an association, but he makes friends here and there who are ready to put through special deals for him. I doubt if there are many industries where such a standard of absolute honesty prevails. A man far away from civilization, police, and courts may be carrying for months a fortune in a pouch next to his skin. He trades on a handclasp. He trusts those whom he does trust on word alone. That way of doing business suits me.

A few of us, seeing that everything centres at Paris when it comes to transforming pearls into cash, have formed the habit of going there in person once a year.

This idea fitted right in with my whole philosophy of life. I've always wanted to experience everything which really belonged to me, and this furthest extreme from the conditions of my work seemed to round out my existence most satisfyingly. It balances up.

It was simply logical too. Talking with these buyers, listening to tales by other pearlers who'd made the trip, I soon began to figure that if it was worth

somebody's while to send these shrewd men all over the world to buy, it was worth a shrewd seller's while to offer his wares in person where the price was. Anyone who has come under the spell of pearls feels anyhow that he's simply giving away these marvellous "babies," at whatever price he gets.

So at the end of one fishing season I started West.

I didn't take any letters of introduction. I could easily have gotten them; but as a rule I've found it more satisfactory to meet new conditions just as they came. You miss some things and learn less if you prearrange the future too carefully. A man who keeps his eyes and ears open can always get along anywhere. I just blew into the city which admits itself to be the centre of world civilization.

The first thing I learned was to make for a tailor. Clothes don't occupy much of a man's attention in the South Seas. Here they were everything. A stranger could not get started or feel comfortable with either Parisians or foreigners unless he was well dressed.

Having attended to this essential, I looked up the pearl houses. Not difficult, that. You have merely to walk up one street, rue Lafayette: nothing but pearl dealers on each side, one after the other.

No trouble either in securing lots of information. Sellers were as ready to display their stock as they are the world over, and these men would show everything, in the realization that one doesn't buy a pearl as one does a sausage. Ready to talk straight, too, to a man who they see knows something. One can learn

a lot by spending an hour or two a day in these shops

The buyers also were cordial enough: it's a seller's market in pearls which are at all above the average. I soon discovered, though, that the best plan was to entrust a few pearls to an agent and let him try to place them.

These brokers are recognized intermediaries. They have to be reliable or they can't last long in that business. Such a man may have a shop and business of his own or may devote himself entirely to brokerage. It's a highly specialized activity, and these chaps know every quirk of it.

When I would call on one of the larger merchants, I could see in his eyes as he watched me: "Here's something raw, right from the beaches. How many pearls has he? How much does he know? How soft is he going to be on a deal?" It was much simpler to get into the trade current and employ a broker at a 5 per cent. commission.

These brokers do a lot of their trading on the street or in the cafés. What they don't know of trade tricks isn't needed in the pearl business. Their job is to sell, and it's up to the buyer to beware, all right. They'll pick out of your parcel the pearls that have spots or blemishes and wait for a cloudy day to offer those: even the expert can't gauge them without sunlight. The beauties, on the contrary, are displayed on a nice bright day, when the brilliant light enhances their colour and lustre.

In the cafés you will see their business battles in full swing—displaying, praising, arguing, bargain-

ing. And every now and then one will exclaim, "Sold!" —and they begin all over on another batch or specimen.

With a prize "baby," the broker may first conduct a long subterranean campaign to discover who's in

CORAL AND FILE FISH

the market for that special size, colour, and shape. His aim is to locate this secretly anxious buyer without ever showing the pearl he has to sell. Carefully he stages a meeting, leads the talk to the very thing in the buyer's mind. Then, dramatically, he flashes this beauty at him. If he's correct, and this will really serve to fill the order the buyer's been anxious about, it's all over but a little chaffering, for the latter doesn't dare to wait for fear someone else will see it and grab it. They're dealing, you see, with highly individual

gems, where the keen demand is for special effects, which sometimes can't be found for months.

Many a time I've watched these scenes, and it's come over me with a sort of shock that the pearler and the pearl dealer have almost no human relation to each other. The difference is not like that between men engaged in different occupations. These two seem to live in different worlds. These French fellows were masters in their own line; they understood certain sides of human nature only too well; at digging up information, working up the other man, tireless bargaining, never losing sight of the final sale, they could command admiration. But complete absorption in that one idea of *Buy low, sell high* can't help producing a definite type of human being. And personally, it's not for me.

We master pearlers get terribly angry with them at times: then we take a drink and agree they're a different species.

I discovered though, as before, that life in the open, in rough conditions, where a man has only himself to depend on, helps in judging men, even of the city variety. I've never been robbed; no one ever took any pearls from me; I hardly ever lost any money. If you can size up a man you know whether it's safe or not to hand over your hard-won prizes to him. We had no underground sources of information, no Bradstreet to consult, no friends from whom to seek advice. We'd start with the first impression a man made on us; then, if the thing were important, we'd invite him out: you know a lot about anybody when

you've watched him relaxed, on an evening of pleasure.

Pearls are not advertised. The trouble always is to get enough good ones. Apparently there are thousands and thousands of women, especially in America, who keep enlarging their strings year by year, or who want other ornaments to match a fine necklace. I could take a couple of bags full of fine pearls to Paris and sell them all at once without much affecting the market. The world seems hungry for them.

And the supply depends on humans out yonder who must make machines of themselves, risking their lives day by day, out on the fringes of the world, in the strain of undersea work.

Even the Indian rajahs have agents in Paris—and the Paris dealers are combing that country also. Their pearls are usually drilled so clumsily that they're unfit for necklaces and must be used in settings. For centuries Indian princes have been pouring their surplus revenues into gems, particularly pearls; and while there are vast quantities of baroques and strange shapes among these accumulated treasures, that land is a colossal storehouse of pearls, many of superlative beauty and value.

This great Paris trade is concentrated in a few hands. A handful of houses, with Rosenthal at the head, really control it, with all the rest of the small fry as hangers-on. There seems to be a pretty tight ring, or syndicate, which among other functions tries to hold up the market—just as in the diamond industry. The ramifications are extraordinary, with

buyers scouring the whole globe; and the total must approach "big business," when you can sell just a little string of these luscious gems to a customer in America for a million dollars.

"Wise guys" as they are in their own field, these middlemen are ludicrously ignorant of all that has to do with the oyster on the sea bottom which creates their product. When Mikimoto, the founder of the "culture pearl" industry in Japan, some years back introduced his product and tried to popularize it as equal to the natural gems, the whole crowd dashed wildly about like ants when you beat on their hill. Buying simply stopped for a time.

They didn't wait to investigate. They appeared positively hysterical with alarm and indignation at this slur on the pearl's fair fame. A regular campaign started in the newspapers (often stated to have been financed by the syndicate), attempting to prove once for all that these cultures were not real pearls. The cheap fakers took advantage of all this, and I saw all sorts of imitations, glass beads, advertised as "Japanese pearls" in the windows of cheap jewellery shops. The whole thing culminated in a court action over the right to sell these cultures as "real" pearls.

Of course, there wasn't the slightest scientific basis for disclaiming the oyster's work merely because man had helped him along, bred him in protected waters, and introduced bits of shell or nacre for him to build on. They were real pearls; and the dealers' excited yelps did them more harm than good.

The joke of it all was that there wasn't the slight-

est need of any excitement. The harvesters of natural pearls have always produced a hundred, or a thousand, poor and mediocre ones to each perfect specimen. It's only the large, perfect ones which constitute the fancy product, and the oyster which the Japanese have found it possible to breed does *not* produce pearls of this grade and never can. It does not secrete that most exquisite nacre which marks the finest pearls. It is *margaritifera martensi,* closely related to the Ceylon oyster; but the fact is, as they could easily have discovered, that over a period of years, this species in "captivity" has never furnished any gems that the market need worry about.

Mikimoto has been at this experiment for nearly forty years; he has had the whole power of the Japanese government behind him, ready to do great things, and build up a vast national industry, the moment it appeared practicable. And nothing has happened. Nor ever will, in my opinion. The process is slow, uncertain, expensive. There are invading pests in the culture farms. Most important of all, the combination of conditions by which a perfect large pearl is formed is so complex that I do not think it will be worked out artificially.

Nor has the industry nothing whatever to fear from the imitations. If anyone tells you you can put the cleverest imitation into a string of real pearls and not detect the difference, that person is either grossly ignorant or is trading on the ignorance of others. Such a statement is childish.

The best imitations are merely glass beads with a

skilful coating of a fish-scale preparation. (The Romans made them two thousand years ago.) Some of them are pretty enough around a beautiful woman's throat, and you see plenty of them there during this contemporary fad for imitation jewellery. I have no quarrel with all that. But the man who calls them undistinguishable from fine pearls has never really seen a pearl—or wants to sell his wares.

There is one breed of fakers who have an entirely legitimate place in the industry. That is the trade named for the skilled workmen who "skin" pearls, and perform other surgical operations on them. Being built up in layers, it is possible to remove the outer "skin" of a large pearl—a very delicate job, done under the microscope. Also it's a great gamble: the inner skin may be superb or it may be worthless.

Most of the talk about "sick" pearls is mere superstition. They are soon discoloured if sulphur gets at them, and some human skins will produce this discolouration. There are whispers, too, of a secret process for "drying the salt water out," which sound to me like idle rumours. So far as my observation goes, the pearl is at its utmost brilliance and beauty when it is first taken from the shell. And I've never found them requiring any special care in handling. We stick them into a chamois bag, and think no more about that side.

The fascination of these lustrous globules is such that I shall probably continue pearling as long as I'm physically able to captain a boat. There are many

spots I still want to work, some familiar, some I've never visited during my twenty years' experience.

From my own observation I should pronounce the Persian Gulf as the home of the finest specimens. They do not run to the largest sizes here, but in quality they are supreme.

The biggest are probably taken in the Paumotus and off North Australia.

The Paumotus are also the chief source of black pearls—though I've been told that the Gulf of California has shell which are apt to produce these.

The Caribbean and South American pearls in general tend to show a yellowish tinge. This puts them out of the running nowadays. I do not mean, of course, that amazing golden yellow, almost saffron, colour displayed by a few marvellous pearls found at Shark's Bay, West Australia. (There is a superb specimen of over 30 grains owned by a New York woman.) Colour to-day must be definite, instantly classifiable, whereas many of these pearls from American waters suggest a mere yellowish discolouration.

CORAL AND FILE FISH

CHAPTER XXII

THE SECRET BEDS OF PRECIOUS CORAL

HARVESTING the wild ocean crops has always seemed to satisfy some of the deepest human instincts. Often it is the easiest way of making a living with little or no capital beyond energy and daring; one returns to that blissful primal state before the curse of Adam, where there is no obloquy in reaping where one has not sown; there is danger that makes one physiologically more alive, and marvellous adventure which the grown child ever craves, and sudden change and delightful variety, as opposed to the dull mechanic

round of farming or manufacturing or city office work—usually the more effective the more an average man's personal efforts are limited and standardized; and, above all, it leaves a wide door for Chance to reward the earnest seeker with some swift, open-handed bestowal of hidden treasure from the unimaginable storehouse of Mother Ocean.

How could one fail to importune a Power who tosses prodigally upon the seaweeds and shores of Samland, in East Prussia, masses of that strange fossil resin we call amber, whose power of becoming electrical when rubbed has for thousands of years given it magical virtues in men's eyes?

Or whose waves play carelessly with lumps of ambergris, sometimes worth a fortune from the perfumers, though it be but a "biliary concretion" from an unfortunate cachalot?

Chiefest of these gifts of Eastern and Southern seas is, of course, the pearl and its shell, to gathering which I have devoted most of my working life: not only because it pours each year twenty millions or so of dollar-value into the world's coffers, but just because pearls are—pearls, with that irresistible lure of which I have tried to give some faint idea.

But there are many others, forming a large group of industries of sea adventure.

Gone, to be sure, are those days when the South Seas were the chief hunting ground of the sperm whalers; when over seven hundred ships from America alone scoured the face of these waters, for years at a time, to make "oil millionaires" in New

Bedford and Nantucket and Sag Harbor and Stonington long before we learned to tap quick and easy money from the earth reservoirs of petroleum; when a single vessel's cargo might be worth over a hundred thousand dollars. *Moby Dick* has forever embalmed in a prose epic that escape from New England routine dullness to the wonders of tropic deeps. With sturdy steamers and explosive projectiles the Norwegians and Newfoundlanders now take fin whales and humpbacks among the Arctic floes; and far in the Antarctic a fleet of great steam whaleships outdoes the tale of Jonah, killing from afar and hauling the great prizes bodily aboard into a hold through gaping jaws in the vessel's bow. But one must read Melville or Frank Bullen to live again the life of the old South Pacific whalemen.

A standard industry which persists, but does not touch the West, is the gathering of *bêche-de-mer.* The common name of this seafood creature probably comes from a bilingual corruption, *bicho* meaning a slug, or worm, in Portuguese; and it is so closely identified with the primitive life of the island beaches that *bêche-de-mer,* or *bêche-la-mar,* has come to signify the mongrel jargon by which the many races there communicate with each other. (It is a true Tower of Babel language, far more mixed than Chinese "pidgin.") To the Polynesian the animal is *rodi;* in the Carolines, *menika;* for the Chinaman, when dried for his table, *tripang.*

This sea slug is an echidnoderm, near kin to the starfishes and sea urchins. He looks something like

a brown, black or red cucumber, from a foot to eighteen inches long; and the sharp eyes of his hunters can pick him out on the white sand bottom in fifty feet of water. In calm weather the natives collect the red variety from the top of the reef, just inside the breakers; when it blows, they dive or fish for the blacks in the lagoon. The fancy grade is the "brown with teats."

Most of the supply is produced in as crude fashion as the turf charcoal of New England in other days, or the codfish catch of Newfoundland spread on rough drying-flakes and stacked in sheds like firewood: the divers bring up the slugs, smoke them by the ancient method in a shack on the beach, and pile them up in another hastily built shelter, to be collected by small trading boats and passed on to dealers for the avid markets of China and Japan.

Another quite unorganized trade is in the supply of tortoise-shell. The hawksbill, smallest of the sea turtles, has a back roofed with thirteen bony tiles, irregular in shape but sometimes over a foot long; and in a three-foot specimen—about the maximum —these plates will furnish as much as eight pounds of shell, harder and less fibrous than horn, and showing when polished those beautiful translucent ambers, with rich brown markings, which have always made it precious material for ladies' combs and toilet articles, for handles and boxes, for inlays on buhl furniture. The best qualities come from the coasts of New Guinea and the Celebes; and the shrewd trader is always ready to pick up a good batch. The

plates are worked up under moderate heat, flattened, joined together, moulded, and perhaps carved.

The much larger loggerhead turtle furnishes the bulk of the turtle-oil sold and a far inferior grade of shell; while the green turtle, a vegetarian living mainly on sea wrack and algæ, has a definite value as the source of true aldermanic soups. (The discriminating London market, awed by lord-mayorish requirements, will accept only females, the longer-tailed males being held too coarse-flavoured to achieve such a destiny.)

An amusing addition to the trade possibilities came when the fashions in women's footwear went reptilian. Starting from New York on an expedition in 1929, I carried with me several samples of snakeskin and a contract from a dealer to take at quite a high price all the skins I could secure with those patterns—though he declared the market might drop out from under his feet at any moment. I know lagoons where I fancy I could fill a boat with those snakes by judicious use of a few charges of dynamite.

Perhaps the most elusive of these side lines to pearler's work is the raw material of precious coral. And it is by no means accidental that even those in the business have known so little about it.

There are many polyps which produce coral formations—treelike growths, rock masses, reefs; but *corallium rubrum* has always had a place to itself. In India, from remotest times it was endowed with all sorts of mystic properties, and even now it preserves from the evil eye and cures sterility in Mediterranean lands;

both in the Orient and the West it has stood beside the choice gems for ornamental jewellery. I've been told there is a small, perfect tree of rose-pink coral among the imperial treasures of Japan which is inventoried at quarter of a million dollars.

For centuries our coral came mainly from off the coasts of Italy and North Africa. The centre of the trade was once at Marseilles; but for over a hundred years Naples, Rome, and Genoa have had almost a monopoly of working up the material: there is a whole Neapolitan suburb which does nothing but cut and smooth and polish and carve and string many-hued corals.

Volcanic disturbances off Sicily apparently destroyed the local beds; and the Algerian beds, overzealously controlled by the French (and requiring ten years for a fresh crop), became almost unproductive. Consequently, as I discovered ten years ago, the Italian finishers were getting their entire supply from Japan; and it was positively asserted that this came from territorial waters of Nippon, where none but natives could operate. For a long time the big Neapolitan firms had had alert buyers in Osaka, but they were not allowed even to trade in the southern islands from which, it was vaguely understood, the precious coral came.

Now, I am a pearler—predestined, I sometimes feel, but certainly confirmed irrevocably ever since I opened that oyster containing my Big Pearl off the New Guinea reefs. But this happened to be a between time for me; and, anyhow, I've always had a suffi-

ciently lively curiosity, and belief in life's possibilities to try any promising novelty at least once.

Besides, this coral business had a seductive mystery about it: nobody could tell me just where it was found, and the depths from which it must be gathered didn't sound like "territorial waters" to a man who had knocked about Eastern seas a good deal. Then, too, the range of the thing appealed to one's imagination: small red pieces, used in cheap necklaces, were worth perhaps a dollar an ounce, while large branches of the finest rose-pink tints ran up to six or eight hundred times as much. And then these semi-fabulous, complete, perfect trees! Quarter of a million is getting even beyond the pearl class! A well-equipped diver, accustomed to explore the sea floor thoroughly, ought to be able to show some new tricks to the naked little yellow fishermen monopolizing that game.

So in 1920 I simply picked up and went there, to investigate at first hand. A man I knew in Tokio gave me an introduction to a fisherman on the island of Kuchinoshima, headquarters of the industry. (I didn't advertise the fact that I was really interested in the coral.) That's a minute lump a hundred and sixty miles due south from Nagasaki, just below Colnett Strait—one of the top islets in the great chain stretching most of a thousand miles from the main Japanese group to Formosa.

We ran down in a little sailing boat, and late one evening I landed on this place where, it was said, no white man had set foot since a vessel was wrecked there forty years before.

It was a primitive crowd that pressed about to stare at the strange bleached newcomer, hundreds of women and children who had never so much as seen Nagasaki; but they were a fine type of simple old-time Japanese folk, wearing kimonos and their traditional costumes with not a trace of European influence. They showed all the politeness one reads about; but the young student I'd expected to bring along as interpreter had been delayed and was to join me later, so I could not do much in the way of conversation.

I walked up from the beach among this swarming, chattering mob—it seemed like thousands—carrying little lanterns which they'd hold up to try to get a good look at this light-skinned, fair-haired prodigy who had landed on their shores from a world they were unable even to imagine. There was no thought of an inn; but I was led to one of those toy houses, where you take off your boots before entering, and partitions and walls are simply lifted out and folded together by day, then set up for "privacy" at night.

We had not been well provisioned on our trip down, and my last pretense of a meal was so far back that I was half starved: my chief concern was how I was to convey that fact to these kindly people. Of course, though, I understood there must be the usual formal preliminaries.

Kicking off my shoes, I entered the flimsy house and sat myself on the floor. A dignified old chap, who seemed to be my host, took his place opposite. Someone solemnly brought out a lacquered box containing

two long-stemmed pipes. We smoked ceremonially —a couple of draws, puff out the smoke slowly, remove the pipe; then start all over. The etiquette is as fixed as that of a presentation at Court.

By this time, to the distress of my host, the curious crowd was surging all around and into the house. Those who failed to get inside promptly cut big slits in the paper windows or made holes in the thin walls, determined to have a look at the novel show. You could see alert black eyes peering through everywhere, between the heads and shoulders of those with ringside places.

Presently they brought out some of their delicacies —seaweeds and sharks' fins and raw messes and such.

That wasn't in the least what the Western barbarian was needing: he wanted some good solid sailorman's grub, chicken by preference; and his chief concern was how to get that idea across to these hospitable but misguided entertainers. This was mortifying, too, for I'd been up against so many situations with savages, where sign language was necessary, that I thought pretty well of my abilities in that line. But what sign would mean "Not sharks' fins but chickens" was a puzzle.

First I tried to work it out by elimination, shaking my head energetically when the first course of some indescribable trifle was offered.

A hiss of disappointment went up from the circle. The server darted away and was back at once with something else. Again I firmly declined. The old headman's face showed deep concern. A buzz of

worry ran about the room. There was an apprehensive silence as another attempt was made to meet my incomprehensible taste. And when I again declined the dish all broke out into shrill cries as if some terrible disaster were impending.

Presently there were several people scurrying back and forth, while the rest stood about, leaning forward and studying my expression as if to wrest the secret by sheer passion of concentration. As for myself, I was growing more and more ravenous—as well as hot and ashamed.

At last I felt I must do something. I jumped to my feet, while the spectators started back, watching me closer than ever. Utter silence fell. Even those outsiders peeping through the windows were still. All waited in open-mouthed expectancy to see what the white monkey would do next.

Stiffening my legs, drawing a deep breath, and flapping my elbows up and down like a triumphant rooster, I let out a tremendous and most lifelike crow: *Ok-a-doodle-ooo! Ok-a-doodle-ooo!*

If there had been any paper windows left intact, I think they'd have been blown out by the roar of laughter that burst from that crowd. They whooped and yelled and bent themselves double and slapped their thighs, and tears ran from their eyes, in a perfect paroxysm of humour.

It was an unusual way of ordering dinner, at that. But it worked. My worried host got the idea like a flash; and before the pandemonium subsided a woman was bringing in some delicious chopped-up

chicken—which I ate with complete satisfaction, unmindful of the audience watching me as if I were a newly caged chimpanzee, and occasionally giving vent to wild, reminiscent crowings which would set them all off afresh.

In fact, during the entire month I was on Kuchinoshima my reputation as the Man who Crowed for Chicken-dinner stuck by me: at any hour of the day or night I was liable suddenly to hear an *Ok-a-doodle-ooo!* from some seen or unseen youngster.

Moreover, from that moment of successful understanding I could get practically nothing in the way of food except fowl. Being stumped to imitate a fish, I literally had to go out in a boat and catch some for myself when I wanted a change of diet. I haven't a doubt but that to this day they are telling the story of the white Chicken-eater on beautiful Kuchinoshima.

Still, though I gave these island folk the best laugh of their lives, I laughed last: for I found all my surmises correct as to their carefully guarded secret. Indeed, how it ever remained so long a secret is beyond my comprehension. Some government astuteness, and a mixture of outside inertia and a blind attitude of superiority, must account for it, since for fifty years those in the trade have bought their stock from Japanese dealers and accepted the official tale that Japan would permit no outsiders to fish these waters.

Yet the truth proved to be, just as a man of any experience would expect, that none of this precious

coral, upon which the world trade depends, comes from territorial waters! The beds lie eight to fifteen miles offshore, open to anybody. And it took a pearler to find that out!

It was worth the trip to see that coral fleet at work. The entire harbour was so thick with the fishing-boats that one could walk right across it from vessel to vessel when they were all in. Each boat carried a crew of eight or ten men; and the only implement is a rude dredge—a sort of crazy mop, seven feet long, with a bunchy head of fibres. This primitive contrivance is dragged over the bottom in sixty to a hundred fathoms of water: the fibres catch in the coral branches, and the crew hauls up, breaking off large or small pieces, or the line, as the chance may be. All day long the cheerful little yellow men drag and pull, drag and pull.

It is gruelling, monotonous, poorly paid work. Still, there is always that radiant possibility that a man born to luck may detach a perfect, living, little branched tree of the prized rose pink: such a treasure, be it no larger than a man's hand, would permit a Kuchinoshima fisherman to retire and keep his family in luxury for the rest of his days.

A blind, hit-or-miss, wasteful method this on which the coral supply depends.

As a roving master pearler I considered anything beyond the three-mile limit to belong to him who could take it; but my plans for a trial did not work out quickly, and shortly after I returned to the work nearest my heart.

I've taken a little precious coral here and there, without ever making a business of it. But often since that trip I've dreamed of what a man might find on that ocean floor if he could devise a means of getting down there in some improved diving gear.

EPILOGUE

LOOKING BACK AND FORWARD

IN LOOKING back over my life up to this thirty-ninth year, I feel I have been marvellously fortunate.

To have found the life and work where I belonged, which has never lost its hold on me—on the other side of the world from where I was born, through such an improbable chain of coincidences, surely demands the erection of an altar to the Goddess Fortune.

And looking forward I have the sense of being again at the beginning. The new system to which I

have referred, permitting me to work to far greater depths, has been tested with complete success.

If my luck holds, I expect to have at my choice vast stretches of hitherto unexplored ocean bottom, where, as I have stated, are the true beds of big pearl oysters.

But whether the future contains this realization or not, I feel I have lived.

THE END